University of Alberta

Widening Paths:
The Lives of Three Generations of Maya-Mam Women

By

Adrienne Dawn Wiebe ©

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Department of Anthropology

Edmonton, Alberta

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled *Widening Paths: The Lives of Three Generations of Maya-Mam Women* submitted by Adrienne Dawn Wiebe in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Abstract

This study of the lives of three generations of women from a highland Guatemalan Maya-Mam, Comitancillo, San Marcos, is based on the narratives of 60 women, supplemented with participant observation, and archival and documentary data.

The lives of the "grandmothers" (women born before 1950) followed a standard basic pattern, as is common in smaller, indigenous peasant communities. Their lives were shaped by a relentless routine of gender-based domestic and agricultural labour, large families with high infant mortality rates, externally-imposed labour migrations, and periodic food shortages and epidemics; however, their cultural community provided a measure of security and a sense of identity through a relatively stable subsistence base and internally-integrated household and community institutions.

The "mothers," women born between 1950 and 1970, experienced the decline of the traditional economic base of the community, the intensification of external economic changes, and increased educational possibilities. The majority of these women were not in a position to take advantage of the emerging educational and productive opportunities, and at the same time they experienced the loss of status and security associated with the traditional cultural patterns.

The lives of the youngest generation of women, the "daughters," exhibit the greatest diversity of life paths, and simultaneously reveal increasing socio-economic stratification as enormous disparities emerge between a minority of young women who have been able to take advantage of new opportunities and the majority of young women who have not been able to do so.

The data not only reveal the diversification and stratification of women's life paths over the course of a century, they also both support and challenge the existing theories concerning gender, culture change, households, and development. Patterns of women's access to land are very different from comparable communities elsewhere, in that women inherit, own, and bequeath land. Cultural and social factors play a critical role in land utilization, household strategies, and women's self-definitions, values, and life path choices. Using externally-defined variables to

measure women's status are frequently inaccurate, as Maya-Mam women's priorities and values are not necessarily the same as those of dominant and/or external institutions.

Acknowledgements

In the same way that this research project focuses on the unique convergence of people, time, and place, this dissertation came to be as a result of a similar convergence of people, time, and place. I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the people whose support and participation made this particular project possible.

This narrative-based research would not have been feasible without the previous opportunity that my family and I had to live and work in Comitancillo (1992-1996). I am grateful to the organizations involved in various ways in our time there: the Asociación Maya-Mam de Investigaciones y Desarrollo (AMMID), Pueblo Partisans, Sombrilla Refugee Support Society, and the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA).

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Chapter 1
Introduction and Literature Review

1. Situating the Research Project

In the past three decades, gender has been recognized as critical variable in social and cultural analysis and this insight has been accompanied by an increase of research attention in the area of cross-cultural gender studies (e.g., Boserup 1970; Bossen 1978 1982; Moore 1988; Visvanathan 1997; Marchand and Parpart 1995; Chant and McIlwaine 1998). Initially, there was a search for a set of theoretical explanations for gender roles, relations, and inequalities that could be applied uniformly across cultures (Connelly, et al. 1995). This was the case with many of the theoretical models rooted in biological, social or economic factors, such as those built around nature/culture or production/reproduction dichotomies (Di Leonardo 1991). By the 1990s, these types of all-inclusive approaches to the cross-cultural complexities of gendered lives were largely abandoned, as the immense variability of gender constructions in diverse geographical, cultural, historical, and economic contexts was recognized.

> Constituted by, embedded within, and impacting upon a multitude of economic, demographic, social and cultural processes, gender is inherently diverse and inherently amenable to change. Yet while the rejection of naturalizing and transhistorical conceptualizations of gender is now accepted, we are still at a stage where our understanding of how these complex processes operate, and what they might imply for successive generations, remains stubbornly elusive. (Chant and McIlwaine 1998: 1-2)

It became apparent that the concept of gender could not be cross-culturally explained with a single theory nor was it structured in a globally uniform manner. Currently there is recognition of the need to examine both the similarities and differences in the meaning and practice of being female and being male in different parts of the world, and to look at the situation-specific forces that create these conditions (Okeke 1996; Chant and McIlwaine 1998:2). There is also an understanding that broad theoretical formulations must be built on a much larger database of information concerning the structure and dynamics of gender in the diversity of socio-cultural settings and times (e.g. Rosenbaum and Eber 1992: Lavrin 1993; Marchand and Parpart 1995).

As a contribution to the process of theory development, this study examined, documented, and analyzed women's experiences within the household and the community in one specific geographical, historical, and cultural context. Specifically, this study explored

Guatemalan Maya women's lives during the twentieth century in the transition from a largely subsistence-based economy into an increasingly cash-based one; and from a largely isolated rural, culturally cohesive community into a community linked more directly into national and global economic, social, and political structures.

Thus this research project posed the following questions: How has the lived experience of highland Mayan women changed over the course of the past century, particularly in their productive and reproductive lives within the household? How do the data collected here fit within existing macro theories concerning the structure and dynamics of gender within households and within communities? In what ways does the information from this particular context sharpen our understanding of the structure and dynamics of gender cross-culturally?

In order to address these questions, the women's narratives gathered here center on the life paths, choices, and daily routines of three generations of Maya-Mam women in the municipality of Comitancillo, in the western department of San Marcos, Guatemala. The women's stories were a vehicle for examining the shifting gender-based divisions of productive and reproductive labour, resources, responsibilities, interpersonal dynamics and benefits within the household. This micro-level analysis is situated within the context of larger social and economic trends such as intensifying land shortages, increasing access to formal education, natural resource deterioration, changing cultural values and practices, the legacy of the armed conflict in Guatemala, and the current Maya revitalization movement.

2. María, Manuela, and Marta: Three Women's Stories

As an introduction to the central themes that emerged from the narratives of *Comiteca* women, the life stories of three women from different generations are outlined here. Their stories highlight the shifting economic roles and household relationships that each successive generation of women experienced at the individual level within the context of the larger socio-economic transformations.

María[1]

María was born in 1910 in an isolated valley in the shadow of the Tajamulco Volcano, the highest in Central America. Her grandfather was considered the wealthiest man in the community because he had the largest extension of land and largest herds of sheep. Her parents went to live on a coffee plantation as *rancheros* (permanent labourers) when María was young, however, she stayed in her grandfather's household in the highlands. There was no school at the time, and she rarely left the valley; she never went to markets or fiestas. Beginning when she was five years old, María and one of her young cousins were responsible for herding about 100 sheep every day. They would get up early every morning to grind corncobs for food for the pigs. Then after breakfast they would leave for the whole day to take the sheep to pasture. At the time the area was very sparsely populated, so land for grazing sheep was plentiful. Another cousin would bring them lunch in the field. They didn't return home until five or six o'clock in the evening.

María says that she did not suffer material needs as a child because her grandparents always had enough maize and beans to feed the household. At the time everyone wore the traditional Comiteco clothing: dark blue *corte* (wraparound skirt), red *huipil* (blouse), and black and white *faja* (belt) for the women; and white *moj* (white linen) pants and shirt, with a red belt for men. María's grandfather wove the *huipiles* on a backstrap loom for all this grand-daughters, but they bought the *corte* and *moj* cloth from other weavers in the community.

When María was fifteen years old (1925) she decided to go to live with her parents on the plantation because she felt that the three daughters-in-law that had married into her grandfather's household were too domineering. She went to Finca La Suiza, a coffee plantation in the Department of Nuevo Progreso. At the time there was no transportation, and it took three days to walk to the plantation.

While working on the plantation, weeding and harvesting coffee, she met her future husband, José, who was also from Comitancillo and working as a *ranchero,* (permanent labourer) on the *finca* (plantation). After they talked a few times, he presented himself to her parents and with her parents' permission they were married following Mayan ritual customs. (Civil marriages did not exist on the *finca* at the time; they were eventually married by civil and religious law 40 years later when the Catholic priest in Comitancillo insisted that all couples had to be formally married in the church.) After José and María started a family, she no longer worked in the fields, but stayed in their tiny house preparing the food, caring for the children, washing clothing, and collecting firewood. María gave birth to five children during the years they lived on the *finca;* two of them died as infants and were buried there.

At the *finca,* María learned midwifery skills from the Ladino midwives living on the plantation. She also learned to care for the sick utilizing herbal and homemade medicines. Eventually she was in constant demand because of her reputation as a skilled and knowledgeable midwife and healer. She was compensated for her services with grain, eggs, or a small amount of money.

In the mid-1930s, all the *rancheros* were expelled from the plantation when the German-born landowner returned to Europe. His sons, who retained control of the plantation, felt that is was more cost efficient to use seasonal rather than permanent labourers. Seasonal migrant labourers did not require year-round housing, firewood, and water that permanent labourers needed, nor did the owner have to pay wages during slack periods. There was also a fear that the permanent workers would organize to demand better working conditions and continuous work.

When María and her family returned to Comitancillo, they settled on a piece of land that María's grandfather sold them. They did not inherit any land, because the children of her grandfather's third wife had appropriated most of his land holdings. María and her husband settled into the annual highland cycle of *milpa* (the traditional Mayan triad of maize, beans, and squash) cultivation. They had enough land to produce food for their entire family of eleven children, and later the daughters-in-law and grandchildren that joined the household.

During her lifetime, the valley where she lived slowly filled with people, houses, and new buildings. Several schools were built, and a road was cut across the valley. Until five years ago there was only the occasional vehicle on the one-track dirt road that was impassable in the rainy season. Today, there is regular truck traffic along the road, and several years ago María took her first car ride, feeling extremely nauseated afterwards.

---

[1] All names have been changed and aldeas of origin eliminated from the entire text to preserve the confidentiality of the participants.

Until the 1970s the people publicly practiced Mayan rituals and prayers. María's husband was a practicing Mayan priest. When people were sick or had problems, the Mayan priest would be called to determine whether it was caused by evil or wrongdoing; and to do the necessary ceremonies to rectify the situation. However, with the arrival of a permanent Catholic priest in Comitancillo in the 1960s, Mayan religious ritual practice was suppressed. A Catholic chapel was been built in the community in the 1980s, and weekly masses are celebrated in the *aldea.*

Her eldest children did not receive much formal education. Several now live in the capital city and work as domestic servants or as street/market vendors, while others have established homes and farms of their own nearby. Another daughter and her husband struggled with alcoholism until dying in an accident leaving five orphaned children. Her youngest son, who remains in the family home with his wife and their five children, continues to cultivate the portion of land that he inherited. He is a prominent member of the community council and improvement committees.

María continued to work as a midwife and healer in the community. About ten years ago, the local health authorities attempted to standardize the work of the traditional midwives, and insisted that María attend classes to receive a permission to practice. She says it was an interesting experience as she cannot read, write, or speak in Spanish.

Now, at age 90 years, María misses her husband, who died five years ago. She worries about how she will live, and what she will eat. Although she lives with her son and his family, they are very poor. Her son often neglects his own farm because he is extremely involved in community activities.

María thinks that the most important thing that a woman can have is good health. With good health she can do many things, and enjoy life with her family. She thinks that the most important characteristics in a husband, which she found in hers, are industriousness and responsibility.

Manuela

Manuela was born in 1942 in a community only 45 minutes walk from the town centre of Comitancillo. She also spent her childhood herding sheep on the mountain slopes. Even though there were several schools in the area during the 1940s and 1950s, Manuela, like most children, was told to hide in the *chuj* when the Ladino (non-Mayan people of mixed ancestry) authorities came around to register children for school. Her parents were very suspicious of the school system, and of Ladinos in general, and needed the children for work on the farm. "I lament the fact that I was never able to go to school; my life would have been very different if I could read and write."

As a child, she and her sisters learned to weave *fajas* on backstrap looms, to earn money. This money was turned over to their father for household expenses. As there were no wells or motorized grinders, the female members of the household went early in the morning to collect water, and begin grinding the maize for the day. Breakfast had to be ready by seven o'clock in the morning for the men in the household.

In addition to farming, her father was a merchant, selling goods in the local markets. Manuela's mother died when Manuela was 12 years old, after giving birth to a baby. The baby lived for a year while the sisters tried to keep him alive with *atol,* a drink made of maize or grains.

Manuela helped her father by selling in the local markets with him when she was a teenager. When she was 17 years old she meet Juan, also from Comitancillo, who was selling with his father in the Tejulta market. They gradually got to know each other and married. As is customary, she went to live with his family after they married; however, she says, "I suffered a lot with my dead husband and with my parents-in-law."

She recalls: "We lived with them for two years, and then had to leave because there were so many problems. My husband had inherited some land, but he sold it to buy two beds, an axe, and to pay off a debt. We lived in a small hut, and had very little food. When I was growing up we weren't ever hungry because there was enough food, but after marriage we were very poor. So we went to a plantation in Tapachula, Mexico to work several months every year. I had never worked on a plantation as a child either. With the money we earned we were able to eventually build our own little house."

Manuela gave birth to eleven children, three of whom died as infants. She gave birth to them all at home alone. Her husband was jealous and would not let her go to the Health Centre to be seen by the doctor, nor would he pay for a midwife. With her last pregnancy she had serious problems. The baby was born at eleven months, and she almost died. But her husband refused to allow her to see a doctor. After a difficult birth, the placenta did not come out, and again she suffered. Finally one of her sisters insisted on taking her to the Health Centre, and when she was told she needed to go to a hospital, one of her grown sons took her to the regional capital hospital against the wishes of her husband.

Her husband died 13 years ago because of alcohol; he was drinking every day, and constantly drunk. Two of her adult sons have died because of alcoholism.

Now she lives with one of her sons and his family. They are struggling to survive. She sells vegetables and coffee in the weekly market, and raises chickens and pigs for sale. With the small amount of money she earns, she can contribute food staples such as sugar, salt, and soap to the household.

She also has one grown son who recently traveled illegally to the United States to find work. He had completed grade 9 in school, still an unusual achievement in the community, and wanted to continue studying, but the family could not afford it. Manuela said he cried bitterly when he realize that he could not continue studying, but the only option open for him was to immigrate. He had to pay a *coyote* 26,000 Quetzales (about $5000 Can) to take him underground to the U. S. The family mortgaged their land in the local Saving Cooperative in order to send him to the United Sates. Now any money he is able to earn and send back goes to pay off the debt.

Marta (a composite)[2]

Marta was born in 1975 in a productive and densely populated community across a ravine from the main town. She is the child of a merchant and farmer. Her father took *comales* (large flat clay pans for cooking tortillas) made in the highland communities for sale on the coastal plantations. Her mother wove and sold *fajas* to earn money. However her father became ill, and was unable to continue selling. They struggled along as a family with the income from their fields. Her mother had twelve pregnancies, but five of the babies died in infancy.

Marta is among the younger generation of women who had the opportunity to go to school, even though neither of her parents had gone and they cannot speak Spanish. As she was the second youngest child in the family, her father helped her to finish primary school, which is more than any of her older sisters received.

She married at the age of 17 to the boy next door, Roberto, whom she has known all her life. He is among the first young men in the community to complete high school, and is now a teacher in a local primary school.

Marta and Roberto have occasional discussions about limiting the number of children they have, but the dictates of the Catholic Church and the Roberto's discomfort with his wife using contraceptives have meant that they have not done anything about it. After seven years of marriage they have five children.

Roberto encouraged Marta to continue studying and she did two more years of schooling by correspondence; however she found it hard to combine studying and caring for her children. Roberto is gone all day, teaching from eight o'clock in the morning until one o'clock in the afternoon, and then spends the rest of the afternoon in meetings and other community involvements. Marta raises chickens and turkeys for extra money. She also works as a part-time literacy instructor with a group of women in the community. She earns some money this way. Roberto is fairly responsible for buying the family food staples with his monthly income. They continue to cultivate the small pieces of land they have inherited from their respective parents.

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[2] This is a composite of several young women's life stories in order to prevent identification of any one person.

For the first several years of their marriage they lived together with his parents, as is customary. They then saved money and began building their own two-room house beside his parents. So far they have completed the adobe walls, tiled roof and wooden doors. They haven't yet got the money for the glass window they would like, so the windows are currently covered with plastic. The house has a dirt floor, two large double beds, several tables, and a large wooden cupboard. Marta is still cooking on an open fire on the floor because they haven't been able to afford to build an adobe wood-stove.

Marta's main complaint about her husband is that he drinks alcohol with his friends almost every weekend. He uses up much of the family's meager income, and comes home drunk. He is not often physically violent when he is drunk, but he does scare the children.

Marta has traveled outside the community frequently, as she is involved in various community organizations, and is aware of the basic national issues, and of women's rights. She identifies herself with pride as a Mam and a Mayan woman from Comitancillo. She has great expectations that her children will all complete high school, and have salaried jobs.

These abbreviated life stories reflect the dramatic changes that have occurred in the past century in the ways highland Maya women experience life. María moved from an insular world of sheep herding in an isolated mountain valley, to work on a coffee finca as a wage labourer in an international capitalist trade system, and finally returned to live a peasant life in her community and working as a traditional midwife and healer.

As a child of the mid-twentieth century, Manuela's childhood was fairly traditional: herding sheep, weaving, and assisting her father in the local markets. As an adult, alcoholism, high infant mortality rates, seasonal plantation labour contracts, and restrictive perspectives on women's participation greatly impacted her personal and economic life. Like centuries of Mayan and peasant women, she used a variety of home-based income-generating activities (animal raising, craft production, and market selling) to support her the household. Unlike previous generations of women, Manuela's family is now directly linked to the international labour market, as one of her sons joins the millions of illegal migrants in the United States, working to send remittances home.

As a young woman of the last three decades of the century, Marta, unlike previous generations of women, has had the opportunity to go to school and is fluent in Spanish, the national language. Although her courtship and marriage followed a traditional pattern, Marta's marital and family relationships are undergoing reinterpretation. Alcoholism, family planning, and management of household resources are areas of tension and negotiation in her marital relationship. Her family still relies on a small agricultural base; however wage labour constitutes the bulk of the household income. Like women in many parts of the world, she struggles to juggle wage labour requirements and domestic responsibilities.

In examining the way changing economic, social and political structures impact the lives of *Comiteca* women, this study revealed that external changes are not the only factor that impacts and shapes women's lives. The lives of Comiteca women have been shaped by the intersection of regional, national, and international markets with historical experience, education, local and national gender ideology, migration, ethnic identity, and local conditions. In this study, the multiple representations of gender, class, and ethnicity are studied through the voices of over 60 women from Comitancillo. The voices also provide evidence of the adaptive and resistant strategies of the women in the face of these influences, and the ways in which they create and live their own lives. The narratives also suggest approaches to planned change, both externally and locally initiated, that best meet their practical and strategic needs as they face the twenty-first century.

3. Review of the Literature

A review of three distinct, yet interrelated, bodies of literature will provide the theoretical and empirical context in which to situate this study. The first section outlines the evolution of theory and practice related to women/gender in development in the past three decades since it first emerged as a concern in international development debates. This discussion will provide the larger context for a more specific review, in the second section, of the literature concerning household gender relations, with a geographical focus on highland indigenous communities in Latin America. The third section of the literature review will narrow the discussion even further to focus on the ethnographic research in highland Maya Guatemala concerning women and gender issues. Finally, this overview of the theoretical and research base is concluded with a summary of perspectives on the intricate relationship between economic class and ethnicity, as these two variables have an exceptionally complex dynamic in Guatemala, and must figure prominently in any study of Mayan women in the twentieth century.

3.1. Gender and Development: Theory and Practice

From the 1950s to the 1970s modernization theory provided the rationalization for economic and community development initiatives in the South.[3] Essentially modernization theory envisioned a linear series of stages that societies went through from "traditional" and underdeveloped to "modern", industrialized and developed. Emphasis was placed on overcoming the obstacles and investing the resources to industrialize and commercialize the economies of Southern nations. It was expected that economic "modernization" would be accompanied by improved economic and social conditions for the majority of the population. However, by the early 1970s there was growing evidence that the expected benefits were not "trickling down" to the majority; there was a growing gap between the economically rich and the economically poor, and economic change was extremely uneven (Gardner and Lewis 1996:14).

One of the deficiencies identified in this period was that modernization had somehow not reached women, and in some sectors had even undermined their previous positions within the household and community. In her landmark book, *Women's Role in Economic Development* (1970), Ester Boserup was one of the first to observe that women did not automatically become "equal" to men when their communities moved from subsistence to commodity production. Boserup analyzed the impact of agricultural transformation of the gender division of labour in African societies, and identified the central role of women in agriculture within shifting, intensive, and irrigation-based cultivation systems, and the deterioration of their social and economic positions when outside interventions pushed men into cash-crop production. This was the first time gender was used as a variable in the analysis of development impacts, and this study signaled the beginning of the awareness of gender as a consideration in development theory and practice.

Further empirical research and a liberal feminist perspective in the United States provided the foundation for a "Women in Development" (WID) approach to emerge on international development scene in the early 1970s. WID theory perceived the central problem to be women's lack of integration into the economic system (Rathgeber 1990). Thus, the proposed solution was to institute the necessary legal and administrative changes so that women would be better incorporated into the economy. WID models placed primary emphasis on egalitarianism, and on the development of strategies and action programs aimed at minimizing the disadvantages and discrimination of women in the productive sector. Women's economic independence is viewed as the means to achieving improved living conditions and social equity for women.

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[3] Although a completely satisfactory term does not yet exist, in this paper I will use "South" to refer to Africa, Asia and Latin America, and "North" to refer to North America, Europe, Australia, and Japan.

At the practical level, WID projects concentrate on women's access to cash income, either as individuals or members of some form of collectivity. Productive projects that improved women's access to cash through a market economy are the primary focus.

With time, several critiques of this theory began to surface (Connelly et al. 2000:56-61). Firstly, WID was solidly grounded in modernization theory, which held that industrialization and commercialization were the solution to poverty. Thus the problem was perceived in purely economic terms: women were not integrated into the process of capitalist development and therefore were not economically active. The narrow economic perspective also resulted in a disregard of social structures and processes that may be critical factors in women's inequity and oppression. Another problem was the homogenization of women. Women were viewed as a single uniform category, despite differences of class, ethnicity, and culture. And finally, WID focused exclusively on productive aspects of women's work, disregarding or minimizing the reproductive side of women's lives.

In response to these inadequacies, a new approach emerged in the second half of the 1970s, identified as "Women and Development" (WAD) (Visvanathan 1997:21). WAD draws on dependency theory and Marxism; however, neither of these perspectives originally addressed issues of gender relations in great depth. Dependency theory asserts that underdevelopment in the South is the result of "development" in the North. The South was progressively impoverished as the North appropriated Southern resources and labour through colonial and international trade mechanisms to advance industrial and commercial growth in the North.

Marxist social theory, with a slightly different perspective, focuses on the evolution of the mode of production through a dialectic process of class struggle, and relates this to the structure of stratified economic classes (Visvanathan 1997:21-23). It is hypothesized that as a result of the establishment of a system of private property after the Agricultural Revolution, men sought to dominate the labour and fertility of the women and children within the household in order to accumulate property and control inheritance. Both dependency theory and Marxism regard inequitable international economic and social structures as the root of the problem, rather than a deficiency within the Southern society itself, as conceptualized in modernization theory (Connelly 2000:59-61).

Grounded in this economic analysis, WAD begins from the recognition that women have always been part of the economic development process. Thus there is no need to integrate women into the economy; rather, research within the WAD perspective analyzes the nature of women's integration into the economy and how this sustains the existing international structures of inequity (e.g., Bossen 1978). Women's work in the public and private domain is central to the maintenance of existing societal structures.

In practice, WAD-oriented projects tend to be similar to those arising from a WID approach (Canadian Council for International Cooperation 1991). Intervention strategies focus on the development of income-generating activities without taking into account the time burdens that such strategies place on women when they are in addition to the women's existing reproductive and subsistence production responsibilities.

WAD was eventually critiqued for continuing to limit the scope of analysis to economic spheres, and failing to assess the interaction of gender-based social relations such as patriarchy with modes of production and women's position (Visvanathan 1997:23-24). The primary emphasis that WAD theory places on oppressive global structures tends to inhibit a more detailed analysis of gender-based relations and power structures within class categories. There is an underlying assumption that when international structures are more equitable, women's position will improve. As with WID, WAD does not include women's reproductive work in its analysis, focusing almost exclusively on the productive sector.

Based on the experience and debates around WID and WAD, a third perspective, "Gender and Development" (GAD), emerged in the 1980s (Young 1992). GAD aims to provide an holistic analysis, considering the totality of social, economic, and political life in determining what forces shape society, and, in particular, affect women's ability to direct and benefit from development initiatives. The GAD analysis includes relations of power and dominance at the household, community, regional, national, and international levels (Lavrin 1993). Influenced by social feminist thinking, this perspective attempts to integrate both women's productive and reproductive lives into the analysis. Women's participation inside and outside the household, including non-commodity production, is recognized. This is a rejection of the public/private dichotomy identified by earlier feminists.

With GAD, the focus shifts from women per se to the relationships between women and men in various settings. These may be ascribed (i.e. ethnicity, age, sex, kinship) or achieved (i.e. due to individual economic and political activity) relations. GAD focuses specific attention gender relations and dynamics within the family. This approach also moves beyond simply seeing women and men as passive recipients of outside change, but rather recognizes that individuals may respond as active agents in what is happening around them.

In practice, a project that has a GAD theoretical perspective attempts to address both women's "practical needs" as well as "strategic interests" (Moser 1989). "Practical needs" are those related to conditions of daily life, such as housing, education, healthcare, and the lack of resources. Projects addressing practical needs generally work within existing gender relations and women's historic roles and responsibilities. "Strategic interests" refers to the larger issues of women's position in society. Projects concerned with women's strategic interests have longer-range objectives such as reducing vulnerability to violence and exploitation, increasing economic security, sharing responsibility for reproductive work with men and the state, and organizing for solidarity and action (Overholt et al. 1991).

There has been extensive debate in the past three decades regarding the impact on women at the individual, household, and community levels, of the transition of relatively isolated, subsistence and peasant communities into communities with cash-based economies integrated into national socio-political systems and global economies (e.g., Boserup 1970; Connelly et al. 1995). Some theorists contend that women gain individual power and self-determination as they are freed from traditional household and community structures that bind them to men and to their household units. Others point out that women lose the complementary status and access to resources that they possessed in traditional peasant societies, and become dependent on the cash-income of men in the household (e.g., Bossen 1984). More recently, scholars have asserted that previous models have failed to take into consideration the complexity of non-economic factors such as cultural ideology, historic specificity, and human agency (Scott 1990; Di Leonardo 1991).

During the 1990s a changing global scene and new theoretical and empirical challenges have continued to reshape the debates concerning gender within processes of economic change and within development strategies. Globalization, the growing environmental crisis, and post-modernism have had major impacts on thinking at both the theoretical and practical levels (Connelly et al. 1995). Increasingly, WID, WAD, and GAD perspectives are critiqued for their assumption of northern development models, and the tendency to assume a North/South dichotomy.

Globalization has been the dominant trend of the 1990s. It has substantially changed the character of economic and social structures, and thus the nature of the interpretation of these structures (Afshar and Dennis 1992; Connelly et al. 1995). Globalization refers to the growing integration of the world economy in terms of capital, labour, and resources. Neo-liberal economics and the modernization approach to development suggest that globalization will benefit everyone if the market forces are allowed to operate freely. Structural adjustment policies imposed by international financial institutions on Southern nations in economic crisis are meant to remove barriers to the free functioning of the world economic system. Within the Left there is debate around how fundamental the economic transformation has been and whether new tools of analysis are needed. Some argue that the underlying dynamics of capitalism have not changed, while others view globalization as a complete reconfiguration of world capitalism with the end of the dominance of mass production and a raise of more decentralized, locally based production (Connelly et al. 1995). However, there is a growing consensus that relationships between North and South are blurring; no longer is there a duality between the two. National boundaries are less important. Increasingly, researchers are studying the differential impacts of globalization on men and women in both the North and the South (Beneria and Feldman 1992; Afshar and Dennis 1992).

Globalization challenges development thinking in general, and gender theory in particular, with evidence that refutes the idea of evolutionary progress in the life of societies. Until recently societal development has been conceptualized as a unilinear path. Modernization theory identified various "stages of growth" that all societies would eventually experience in the movement from primitive to modern. Traditional Marxism also envisioned that class struggle would carry society through a series of stages from pre-capitalist and ultimately to socialism. However, rather than producing uniformity, globalization is producing further unevenness in the world today as "some nations, regions, genders, ethnic groups and classes advance while others are subjected to new forms of subordination, and generate new forms of resistance" (Connelly et. al. 1995:23).

Increasingly it is recognized that all existing societies are contemporaries (Wolf 1982), and that none are purely "traditional" waiting to evolve into modern ones, and that none are "pre-capitalist" in the sense that they have been untouched by global capitalism. However, the global reach of major economic and social forces interacts uniquely at the local, regional, and national levels as people adapt to and resist the conditions they have encountered.

While this thinking has elements similar to dependency theory, such as the recognition of the interconnectedness and disparity of global economic growth, current thinking goes beyond strictly economic explanations to integrate culture and human agency into the analysis (Marchand and Parpart 1995). Restudies of local histories seek to understand how people have constructed their social and economic lives, and their adaptations and struggles to the changing conditions of their existence. Rather than an a-theoretical descriptive empiricism, comparative analytical work explores ways of explaining both commonality and diversity. Three levels of analysis and their intersections are examined: the micro level processes (individual actors), the meso level (gender, class, community, state) and the supra national (international structures and dynamics) (Shuurman 1993).

In a further philosophical opening, "Post-modernism" has challenged the underlying assumptions of theoretical models and labels, and questioned representation within research. The homogeneity of the category of women has been questioned (Mohanty 1991), as well as the universality of such concepts as "patriarchy", "subordination", and "development" (Sachs 1992; Mohanty 1991). At the practical level, the assumption of global sisterhood and universal feminist goals has been contested.

From this literature review, it is evident that gender and development studies are at a point where in-depth localized research expressing emic perspectives, that is, those of the participants, rather than purely those of external observers, is needed to further our understanding of the players, forces, and relationships in particular times and places (Connelly et. al. 1995:32). Community-level case studies that illuminate the specific interactions of cultural, economic, social, and historical conditions in the formation of gender roles and positions will provide a more comprehensive and in-depth understanding of the commonalties and peculiarities at the grassroots level within the broad global trends and patterns.

In response to issues of representation and perspective in anthropological research, it is imperative that new research be extremely sensitive to these dilemmas. One strategy is to imbed the investigation within the focus community as much as possible. The research questions, process, analysis, and findings must ultimately belong to the people involved. Collaborative research of this nature is linked closely to action as it aims to identify interventions that support and strengthen structures and processes desired by those involved.

More specifically for the present work, a close examination of the intricacies of women's lives and the consequences of planned (e.g. development projects) and unplanned (e.g. global market trends) economic change will shed light on the most helpful and desired interventions. The majority of women's community development initiatives from all theoretical perspectives continue to focus on income-generation and incorporation into the cash economy. Yet, how do these initiatives interact with women's lives in specific contexts, and are these always the most appropriate interventions?

3.2. Gender Relations within Peasant Households

The conceptualization and study of gender relations within peasant households has advanced significantly since its inception several decades ago. In many ways the theoretical development of gender relations within the peasant household follows a trajectory similar to that of the gender and development theory described in the previous section. However, this section differs from the latter in two ways. Firstly, while gender and development literature looks at the effects of economic change on the societal relationships of power and privilege between households, this section will look at the effects on relations within the household. Secondly, the geographical and temporal scope of the survey will be narrower in order to provide a thorough grounding for the present research. The survey will cover the last three decades of research in Latin American highland indigenous household studies, a period in which traditional, subsistence farming communities have been increasingly integrated into capitalist modes of production, involving wage labour and commodity production.

During the 1960s and 1970s, the theories of household structure that were predominant in the analysis of Western society were also applied to rural Latin America. In this perspective, structural factors were viewed as determinants in the organization and functioning of the household. Primacy was given to the interaction of lifecycle and demographic composition of the household with the household's relationship to valued resources. It was largely accepted that by using these two 'structural variables' one could predict the form the rural household would take (Phillips 1989:294).

Furthermore, the household was considered to be a homogeneous economic unit that worked on the basis of consensus for a common good (Chayanov 1966). All household members had different work responsibilities according to gender and age, and willingly contributed to the overall household strategy, because all had an equal share in the ultimate benefits. The internal logic of the household took the form of "self-exploitation." It was postulated that the household head, presumably the eldest male, had the complete authority to manage household labour and resources in such a way as to maximize output and distribute the benefits among the members.

An example of this type of research is Cosminsky and Scrimshaw's (1982), comparative study of three communities in Guatemala: a highland Maya town, a coastal plantation, and a Black Caribbean town. The study emphasizes women's changing options and opportunities for economic productivity over time, in relation to their life cycles, and to the life cycle of their domestic groups.

During this period, the basic profiles of male and female within the subsistence household were outlined. While there is, of course, great regional variation, there are some basic characteristics that are common in Latin American highland indigenous communities, and are useful to an understanding of gender at the household level.

As in all peasant societies, the family is the main unit for production and relies on the co-operation of all its members, not merely the head of household. Women play an indispensable role in the peasant economy, and there is a marked segregation between male and female roles and a gender-based division of labour (Scott 1990:208). Many peasant societies have a bilateral rather than strictly patrilineal kinship system; therefore, women have independent access to certain economic resources through inheritance rather than merely through marriage. In highland Guatemala there is evidence that in some communities, it is customary for both daughters and sons to receive an inheritance of land from their parents, although men usually receive a larger plot than women (Hawkins 1976; Smith 1977). A variation of this was noted in Santa Eulalia, a Kanjobal community during the 1960s, in which men inherited land from their parents, and women inherited animals, based on the complementary gender-based division of labour (Davis 1997:86).

At the ideological level there is an emphasis on parallelism and complementarity of male and female roles throughout life, and on the unity of the sexes in the spiritual world (Prado 1999:90-95). Harmony and balance are highly valued in all aspects of life: in relationships, within the family, the community, and with the realm of animals, plants, and land.

Thus, in contrast to the *Ladino* (people of mixed European and indigenous ancestry) culture, women in Mayan cultural constructions are not ideally restricted to the domestic sphere, nor perceived as the dependent property of men. This is illustrated in Maynard's (1974) comparative study of gender relations within Ladino and indigenous families in one community in Guatemala as documented in *Guatemalan Women: Life under Two Types of Patriarchy*. She applies the term "responsible patriarchy" to indigenous family patterns and "irresponsible patriarchy" to *Ladino* families.

More recently, Sara-Lafosse (1998) has argued that what Maynard labeled "irresponsible patriarchy", is actually *machismo*. In Sara-Lafosse's definition, *machismo* is:

> ...a form of masculine behaviour, which comprises the man's desire to take sexual advantage of women, the failure to assume responsibility for the consequences of such actions, and the self-praise for sexual exploits within the subculture of the peer group. (Sara-Lafosse 1998:107)

The roots of this behavioural pattern are traced to social and racial dynamics of reproduction in the Spanish colonial period (Sara-Lafosse 1998:110-112). In contrast to the irresponsibility towards children evident in *machismo*, a central theme in all the various forms of patriarchy is the concern for the proper pedigree, nurturing, and education of one's children because they are the "means to achieve permanence on Earth" (Sara-Lafosse 1998:107) through a enduring continuation of one's bloodline. In patriarchal systems, a control of women's sexuality is critical to guarantee the paternity of children, and to ensure the survival and training of the next generation.

While there is extensive evidence for the existence of *machismo* and patriarchal patterns, as defined by Sara-Lafosse, within Spanish-derived *Ladino* society in Guatemala, the same is not true in traditional Guatemalan Mayan societies (Smith 1995; Prado 1999). *Machismo,* particularly the high value placed on sexual conquests and the irresponsibility towards children, is not common within Mayan families and communities. On the other hand, it can be argued that a modified or diluted version of patriarchy exists in Mayan society because the eldest male is the ultimate authority within the household (Maynard 1974; Ehlers 1990b). However, the is not the obsession with individual bloodlines that characterized European history (Smith 1995:735-728), as Mayans place more emphasize on the survival, reproduction and prosperity of the collective cultural community than on individual family lineages[4] (Prado 1999:55-57). Thus, hierarchical gender relationships exist within Mayan households, but they do not appear to be based on *machisto* or patriarchal principles.

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[4] House lineages were an important part of Quiché society (Carmack 1981), however there is little evidence of this among the Mam of the western highlands (Lovell 1992; Watanabe 1997).

The literature outlines commonalties of the division of labour within peasant households in the region, and these are similar to those found in peasant societies in other parts of the world (e.g., Bourque and Warren 1981; Deere & de Leal 1981; Bossen 1984; Black 1988; Wiebe 1997).

The production of subsistence crops is central to the survival of the household and usually subsistence grain crops are viewed as essentially male responsibilities. However, most often women and children in the household work together with the men in planting, weeding, and harvesting, although particular tasks within each process may be assigned on the basis of gender. Large animals, such as cows, horses, and llamas usually belong to and are cared for by the men in the household, while women care for the smaller animals, such as chickens, turkeys, pigs, sheep, and goats. Age distinctions are important in herding, as the elderly and the children are often responsible for pasturing animals, likely because of their freedom from responsibilities that tie them to the household compound.

Some tasks are strictly women's responsibility, including collection of water for household use; care for children, the elderly, and the sick; and maintenance of vegetable and herb gardens for domestic and medicinal use. Until as recently as 15 years ago, women were responsible to produce all the clothing for their families; however, this task has changed considerably (Hendrickson 1990). As is almost universal, women are largely responsible for the processing and storage of agricultural products, food preparation, serving, and clean up. Children often help their mothers until they adopt a gender division of labour at about age ten.

It is important to note that this division of labour enables women to control the use of the household harvest to a large degree. The women store the harvested grains, and use them as needed throughout the year. Thus the women are responsible to feed the family, but they also have control over the resources needed to do so.

The theoretical approaches applied to essentially subsistence households have been critiqued for containing obvious ethnocentric and androcentric biases. Firstly, subsistence economies do not work on a rationale of "maximizing output" (Groh 1986). Subsistence economies are based on principles of minimization or avoidance of risk, because ensuring survival is valued above full efficiency or maximization of income.

Secondly, the internal organization of the household is assumed to center around a male household head, who acts for the good of the whole. It was taken for granted that the rigid economic and social segregation of the sexes was accompanied by male dominance (e.g., Paul 1974:281). Other aspects of internal gender relations such as decision-making processes, control of resources and benefits, and management of resources, were rarely touched upon in the early research (Bruce 1989; Jaquette 1993).

With these two dilemmas in mind, and the intensifying intrusions of the cash-economy into subsistence societies, a new body of theory and research emerged in the late 1970s and 1980s. The newly emerging theoretical approaches not only addressed the deficiencies in previous models; they also began to examine the changes occurring in traditional, subsistence communities with the entrance of capitalism. These new models have been described as "impact" approaches (Wilson 1985). Although starting at widely divergent political points, scholars within both the Modernization and Marxist-Dependency schools focused on the "impact" of changes in the world economic order on gender relations at the household level. Essentially, this school of thought aimed to assess the impacts of global capitalism on pre-capitalist, peasant societies and gender relations; and generate universal principles of cause and effect.

Proponents of a Modernization approach to development originally suggested that capitalism would release women from feudal obligations and restrictions, because men's power over their wives and children would be reduced when wage labour provided women and children with options outside the household economy. However, almost immediately, researchers utilizing modernization paradigms identified problems for women in capitalist development. Boserup (1970) was the first to hypothesize that capitalist economic development tends to increase productivity of traditional male enterprises, as they acquire access to new methods and tools, and move into the cash economy. Male participation in the cash economy can take essentially two forms: production of cash crops, and/or work as permanent or seasonal wage labour in large-scale agricultural systems. In the process, the household balance of power is shifted away from women, who remain largely within the subsistence agriculture and craft production spheres, as well as carrying the full burden of domestic responsibilities (e.g., Babb 1976). This process has been called the "feminization of subsistence' (Moore 1988:75).

A closely related issue in the shift towards cash crop production is the change in gender-based resource and labour allocations, and the impact on consumption patterns. One of the frequently observed contradictions in the "development" process is that although women continue to be responsible for feeding their families, they no longer have control of the food supply: that is, the household stocks of basic foods produced on the farm itself. In a market economy, women must utilize cash to purchase the household food, yet the male household head often controls the cash (e.g., Katz 1995, 2000). Thus, increased male agricultural income is largely spent on productive or prestige expenses, negatively affecting the woman's ability to fulfill her reproductive responsibilities in the family.

In another study, Immink and Alarcon (1993) used rural survey data produced after a crop diversification program in highland Guatemala to study this relationship. They indeed found increased household vulnerability to reduced food availability when the household no longer directly produced its own food. While they found that male control over the income generated through commercial crops was a significant factor in diminished nutrition and food security in the family, an additional contributing factor was that the crops were less profitable than anticipated.

Research from a Marxist/Dependency or "political economy" framework has also found that men benefit more from the introduction of capitalist modes of production than women. The status and access to resources women had in traditional peasant society decline, as capitalist organization removes women from direct agricultural production.

Many of the studies emphasize that while capitalist growth does not have a uniform impact upon women in different regions and classes, it does tend to seize upon gender divisions as a basis for hierarchically defining different categories of labour. Almost always, women carry the double burdens of unpaid reproductive responsibilities and underpaid productive work (e.g., Deere and León de Leal 1981; Rosenbaum 1993, Flood 1994).

In several Andean communities in Peru and Colombia, Deere and León de Leal (1981) studied the interaction of relations of gender with changing modes of production and argued that capitalist expansion in the periphery has often intensified women's economic participation in non-capitalist (subsistence) modes of production. Thus, as has been observed in many parts of the world, women become closely associated with subsistence production as men either become semi-proletarian labour within capitalist agro-industry, or focus on cash crop production. (Wilson 1985:1018).

Deere and León de Leal (1981) note that in subsistence communities there appears to be a very rigid sexual division of labour, yet men and women are highly inter-dependent. With increasing entrance of capitalist modes of production, such as wage labour and cash-based exchange, the sexual division of labour becomes much less rigid; however, women of all classes remain solely responsible for domestic work, and tend to have the more poorly paid jobs in the wage labour market.

Similarly, in Zinacantán, a Maya community in the Chiapas highlands of Mexico, Flood (1994) provides evidence that the growing dominance of the cash economy in the region has caused a shift in the gender balance of power at the household level. She argues that "[t]hese changes have undermined a pattern of economic *interdependence* of the sexes, increasing male economic *independence* while placing most women in relatively more *dependent* positions" (Flood 1994:145). At the same time as women's productive resource base erodes, they remain largely responsible for the reproductive needs of the children and elderly in the household, thus creating even greater dependence on male income.

In Chamula, another Mayan community in the same region of Mexico, Rosenbaum observed that "capital benefits from a symbiotic relationship with the traditional subsistence economy it enforces; the unpaid work of women guaranteed the reproduction of the labour force" (Rosenbaum 1993:126). Because of population pressures and associated land deterioration, Chamula must look outside the geographical community for resources for survival. Households often require the men to work periodically in the cash economy outside the community, while the women remain involved in subsistence production. The necessity for a combination of economic strategies within each household limits the penetration of industrial production and consumer goods into Chamula, and thus prevents the full assimilation of Chamula into the dominant system. Unlike Zinacantán, in Chamula this fosters the strong interdependency between husband and wife that is usual in subsistence-based economies.

While these studies have deepened our understanding of household gender relations in rural Latin America by situating the analysis within economic processes, the underlying assumption of these perspectives is that the structure of gender relations changes in a predictable manner in response to economic stimuli (Wilson 1985:1020). Both the modernization and Marxist/dependency frameworks confer a dominant status to economic variables, without considering the influence of cultural and social factors such as local gender ideology, cultural identity, and individual agency.

Another weakness is that both modernization and Marxist/dependency perspectives accept the supposition that "native women were better off" (di Leonardo 1991:11). This generalization has been contested recently by a variety of scholars based on newly emerging evidence. Part of the problem may be that "complementarity is equated with equality and economic participation with political power" (Scott 1990:210). Scott hypothesizes that a system of subordination within the family may be necessary to maintain the very balance and stability valued by peasants. Thus contradictions exist between the ideal of complementarity and balanced family relations, and the reality of male power and stratified family hierarchies. These contradictions are likely to be both inherent in the cultural system of the region and introduced as a result of social change from outside forces.

In response to the problems associated with an economic "impact" approach, many scholars are striving to incorporate a range of influencing factors such as ethnicity, social context, historical gender ideology, and individual agency into the analysis of rural household structure and dynamics. It is suggested that the form that gender relations assume at any particular time and place is not governed by one specific variable alone; rather, it can be understood as an outcome of a process involving a variety of interacting contingencies.

Lynn Stephen (1991) utilizes this comprehensive approach in her investigation of the Zapotec community of Teotitlán del Valle, Oaxaca, Mexico. She examines how the interplay of many factors contributes to the conditions of women's lives, and how women use gender-based identities to achieve their own goals. These Zapotec women suffered many of the same losses as observed in the decline of subsistence agriculture elsewhere; however, they retained their positions of age-associated status linked with the traditional ritual hierarchies, and they negotiated a degree of influence and independence within the historically female arena of textile production.

Another application of this conceptual framework compares women's lives in an indigenous town and a rural village in the Mayan highlands of Guatemala (Ehlers 1990b). San Antonio Palopó and San Pedro Sacatepéquez are both communities moving towards intensified textile production as a means of integration into the cash economy. Ehlers examines the interaction of changing modes of production with gender ideology based on the Ladino *machismo/marianismo* dichotomy that influences Mayan social conduct. She argues that women live with abusive and irresponsible behaviour from their husbands both because of their disadvantaged positions within the cash economy, and because the cultural concept of *marianismo* regards female acceptance of abusive male behaviour as evidence of women's moral superiority.

Not only has recent research challenged the supremacy of economic factors in the construction of gender relations; it has also contested previous monolithic views of patriarchy as an explanation for women's presumed universal subordination. Previously patriarchy was conceptualized as the complete authority and control of the male household head over all the other household members. However, as researchers dissect power relations within the household, the notion of absolute patriarchal authority appears to be an oversimplified view of household realities.

In a fascinating example of this type of analysis, Lynne Phillips (1989) examines the complexity of wife-husband relationships in rural Ecuador. In contrast to the analyses that emphasize household consensus, whether authoritarian or co-operative, Phillips proposes that the farm household be viewed as a political unit involving daily negotiations between members, each with different strengths, weaknesses, and objectives. In the case studies presented by Phillips, an intricate pattern of interactions between household members emerges in which each individual manipulates a unique resource base, including income-generating opportunities, family networks, social and cultural expectations, and relationships with the opposite sex, to advance his or her own particular needs and agendas. The description of these women's lives suggests that even though hierarchical relationships exist in the household, and none of the women had complete control over key resources such as land, neither were they utterly without power in the sense implied by the term "patriarchy."

It appears that rural household structure cannot be explained solely on the basis of economic features such as market relations or land ownership patterns, nor can it be explained by a sweeping concept of patriarchy. Rather, household structure is better understood through detailed analysis of gender-based relationship strategies in association with socio-economic class. Furthermore, there is much evidence that household members often have strong common interests and actively work toward common goals; thus the "struggle" model, proposed by some scholars as a response to earlier "consensus" models, needs to be adjusted to embrace these realities.

Like gender and development studies, household gender relations research is currently recognizing the importance of difference. No longer can monolithic concepts or models attempt to explain realities in all corners of the globe. There is recognition of the importance of examining social, cultural, and historical factors in association with economic dynamics. The present research aims to address the need for more locally based examinations of the intricacies that form the relations of women and men within the household, and how these are affected by changing global and local realities.

In the past decade, the "crisis of representation" articulated by the postmodern perspective in the social sciences has challenged the former pre-eminence of Western academic research paradigms, methodologies, and interpretations. In many fields of research, there are new voices being heard from different perspectives and positions in relation to the subject matter.

Unfortunately, at present there are relatively few indigenous researchers in the area of Latin American rural studies (at least, few whose work is available to outsiders); however, there are some, and the number is growing. Some of the recent research in Guatemala will be discussed in the next section of the literature review.

The postmodern challenge has also given rise to misgivings concerning the values and judgments embedded, often unconsciously, in previous theoretical analysis (Phillips 1995; Cole and Phillips 1995). The ways in which concepts such as subordination, oppression, and equality are defined and applied in research and community development practice in diverse geographic and cultural contexts are critically re-examined, and historical anthropological concerns regarding cultural relativism and humanitarian ethics revisited.

3.3. Women in Maya Ethnology

Since the early twentieth century, the Maya of highland Guatemala have been the subject of extensive and in-depth ethnographic research. However, despite the wealth of data generated by social scientists, research specifically documenting women's lives and gender roles and relations is a relatively recent phenomenon. Before the 1970s, ethnographers largely utilized a "closed corporate community" model (Wolf 1957) to frame their research, and thus they tended to focus on community-level religious, economic, and social organization and structure; explicit information about Maya women's lives and gender roles was largely recorded incidentally. Notwithstanding, many of the detailed ethnographies of individual communities in highland Guatemala contain significant kernels of information regarding gender roles and activities which can be useful in corroborating, contrasting, and enriching current efforts (e.g., La Farge 1947; Wagley 1949; Oakes 1951; Bunzel 1952; Tax 1953).

By the 1970s, researchers began to address this gap in the literature with research focused specifically on Maya women (Paul 1974, 1978). Although there were no studies done directly in Guatemalan Maya communities, several seminal studies were done concerning the Maya and Zapotec of southern Mexico (Chinas 1973; Elmendorf 1976). Since the 1980s, research in the region has shifted from a specific focus on women to utilizing gender as the basic element of analysis (Bossen 1982; Stephen 1993). The analysis itself has also become more sophisticated as the complexity of the relationship of gender to class and ethnicity, as well as the impact of changing economic and political structures on gender are examined (e.g., Annis 1987; Black 1988; Hendrickson 1990; Eber 1995).

In Guatemalan research, this trend is apparent in Bossen's study, *The Redivision of Labour: Women and Economic Change in Four Guatemalan Communities* (1984). In this book, the first to focus specifically on Guatemalan women, patterns of women's work in four distinct social contexts are compared: the Mayan peasantry, the plantation labourers, the urban poor, and the urban middle-class, demonstrating that economic structure is a more powerful shaper of gender roles and stratification than conventional cultural or biological explanations.

In *Silent Looms: Women and Production in a Guatemalan Town* (1990a), Ehlers provides a detailed analysis of gender in an entrepreneurial Indian town, San Pedro Sacatepéquez, in which women have a previously unexamined pivotal role in the "female family business" system of cottage industry and trade which characterize the town.

Another researcher, Cabrera Perez-Arminan, compares K'iche' women's lives in two highland communities (San Vicente Buenabaj, Totonicapán, and Santa Catarina Ixtahuacán, Sololá) in *Tradición y Cambio de la Mujer K'iche'* (1992). This is one of the first studies focusing specifically on rural indigenous women; it provides extensive data regarding gender-based roles and division of labour in these two communities within the context of changing economic and political pressures from outside the community, as well as describing program implications for community development initiatives based on the findings. The integral part women play in both the subsistence and cash economies of their families and communities is a salient theme in the study.

However, in this book, women do not view economic variables as the predominant forces in their lives; rather, this book accentuates the primacy of ethnic identity for indigenous rural women. While equitable treatment within the household and community are important to these women, their subordination as Mayan women within a nation dominated by Ladino political and economic structures appears to be a very immediate issue for them. It is helpful to place this finding within the context of the current revitalization movement within Mayan communities in Guatemala, and the indigenous movements throughout Latin America. Perhaps ethnicity has a more critical place in the combination of economic and social variables used to understand women's position than previously recognized. This may be one of the aspects of rural indigenous gender relations that cannot be fully appreciated by an outside observer, and illustrates that "insider" perspectives are necessary for a complete and accurate picture (e.g., Menchú 1984).

The survival strategies of Mayan widows in the aftermath of the years of armed conflict that ravaged Guatemala are the focus of recently published research by Linda Green (1998 1999). Green's exploration into the diverse economic and social tactics utilized by women heading households alone in rural communities delved into the ways in which "violence, both structural and political, operated locally" (Green 1999:8). The violence and oppression of war as well as that of hierarchical class, gender, and ethnic systems have impacted the women's lives in this unnamed community in the Department of Chimaltenango. The women sustained their households through a continued combination of traditional women's enterprises, such as home-based craft production, small animal husbandry, and weaving, as well as attempting to continue productive activities traditionally considered male, such as basic *milpa* and cash-crop production. Income-generation projects for women promoting weaving, soap and candle-making, and animal raising, "did create a cash flow, but it was far from adequate even to begin to address the loss of men in the household as milpa producers and generators of cash income" (Green 1999:147).

In a less isolated part of the department of Chimaltenango, Green examined the impact of direct forms of global capitalist on Mayan cultural communities. This department is located relatively near the capital city of Guatemala, is densely populated, and the communities of the region have been more closely integrated into historical political and economic developments. For these reasons, the region is one of the first in highland Guatemala to experience the penetration of new forms of global capitalism, specifically, the intensive production of nontraditional agricultural exports such as vegetables and flowers, as well as the installation of export apparel assembly factories have invaded the central valley corridor through the region. This has transformed the productive and social relations within the Maya communities most affected by these economic shifts.

> ...the nature of their work practices have also been transformed. It is crucial to locate Mayan culture in work, that is in the *milpa* and weaving, to understand how culture is produced and what the current changes may signify. As adolescent boys and girls as well as entire families no longer have time and in some cases the desire to do that cultural work, the struggles surrounding culture, power, and social relations at the community and household level take on new meanings locally and globally (Green 1998:59).

It is clear from this review of the literature that the study of gender diversity and dynamics within Guatemalan Maya communities and households is a complex new field of inquiry for both foreign and Guatemalan researchers (e.g. Nash 1992; Stephen 1993). Rosenbaum and Eber indicate in their comprehensive overview of gender research in Mesoamerica that:

> ...[H]acen falta estudios etnograficos que presenten un cuadro detallado de las relaciones de género y la vida y activitidades de la mujer [There is a lack of ethnographic studies that present a detailed picture of gender relations and the lives and activities of women](Rosenbaum and Eber 1992:xxiii-xxiv).

It is within this particular niche that the present research study is situated as an effort to provide a detailed account of the facts and meaning of the lives, activities, and relations of women in an isolated Mayan community through the course of the twentieth century.

3.4. Economic Class, Ethnicity, and Social Structure

Given the centrality of economic factors, and their impacts on socio-cultural organization and relationships in this thesis, a review of the four main anthropological approaches to the articulation of economic class and ethnicity is appropriate (Solares 1989). Anthropologists in the first half of the century gave primacy to ethnicity over economic class. These so-called 'culturalists" focused on the 'closed corporate community' pattern of the Maya and identified internal community socio-economic and cultural formations. (e.g. Tax 1953; Bunzel 1952). In the 1960s, an economically-focused analysis emerged from Central American universities that utilized Marxist or Dependency frameworks to define socio-economic classes, and largely disregarded ethnic distinctions (e.g., Flores Alvarado 1971).

In contrast to these two "reductionist" models, there have been two streams of thought that have attempted to understand economic and ethnic configurations in an integrated manner.

The first model correlates social class directly with ethnicity; essentially Guatemalan society is divided into two classes: the Spanish who are the exploiters, and the Mayas who are the exploited. The racial/economic stratifications formulated during the colonial period are understood to remain basically unchanged today (e.g., Guzman-Bockler and Herbert 1970).

Most recently, theoretical efforts have focused on the interactive and overlapping nature of economic and ethnic hierarchies. These studies have looked at how these two variables combine to create unique configurations in specific historical and geographical contexts. Both socio-economic stratification within ethnic groups, and ethnic contradictions within the national arena have been analyzed (e.g., Smith 1990; Watanabe 1992; Carlsen 1996). The present study falls within the last approach, striving to understand past and present realities of Mayan women's lives within the context of economic, ethnic, and gender patterns of power and privilege.

4. Thesis Outline

This review of the existing knowledge base and the predominant theoretical debates provide a starting point for this research endeavour. The next chapter, chapter two, outlines the methodological and practical aspects of the research design and implementation utilized to address these questions. Chapter three presents the geographical context of the case study community, Comitancillo, and traces the history of the community with a focus on the twentieth century. Chapters four through six present the lives of the "grandmothers," the "mothers," and the "daughters" of Comitancillo based on the narratives of sixty women. The final chapter summarizes the findings of the study in relationship to the generalized theories and current debates that exist in cross-cultural gender studies as posed in the first chapter.

Chapter Two
Research Context and Methodology

1. Intersecting Methodologies: Ethnohistory, Gender Studies, and Applied Anthropology

In examining the lives of three generations of women in a Mayan community in the highlands of Guatemala, this study draws on the research methodologies of several streams of cultural anthropology, gender studies, and applied anthropology, and aims to respond to many of the recent challenges in these intersecting disciplines.

Falling within the traditional field of socio-cultural anthropology, and, more specifically, within ethnohistory, this study examines the history of a community of people and their cultural traditions through time to the present. While not claiming to be a full history of the community of Comitancillo, this study traces the lives of women through time; and situates their experience, recollections, and interpretation of these lived lives within other sources of historical information. As Burns points out in the introduction to a recently published work on the history of the Maya-Kaqchikel (Carey 2001):

> History is more than a relating of past events; it is also a conceptual and analytical approach to understanding the past, or historiography...the history of the Americas as seen through the living narratives, conversations, and anecdotes of those who have most lived it (Burns 2001:ix).

Like general ethnography, the study strives to describe and interpret from an emic perspective the experience of Mam women of a particular community who have lived through the changes of the past century. Rather than a single "frozen-in-time" snapshot of one moment in the life of the community, this study takes a longitudinal perspective, looking at the lives of women over the course of three generations in the twentieth century. The ethnohistorical approach draws on historical documentary information to illuminate and contextualize the lived experiences of the participants at particular moments throughout the century, and then integrates both documentary and narrative data to identify threads of continuity and change that characterize the lives of women in this Mam community over time.

Like classical ethnographic studies, the present research project is an exploratory qualitative study that seeks to describe and record the range of experience that exists, and to identify basic themes and patterns, rather than to measure the frequency of particular experiences or directly test an hypothesis or relationship between specific variables (Johnson 1998). Utilizing a general qualitative strategy, information gathered in narrative, documentary, and participant observation forms is examined, described, and classified; then the constituent components and their structural relationships are analyzed and identified. Ideally, the findings in the present study provide a general understanding of the structure and meaning of life for one particular group of people, in this case, twentieth century Mayan women, and also suggest possible relationships between variables for more explicit analysis in the future.

Located within the sphere of gender studies, this research project is sensitive to two of the predominant concerns of feminist scholars. The first concerns the necessity to balance seemingly global patterns with the uniqueness of specific places and times. Initially, within the field of gender studies, there was a search for a set of theoretical explanations for gender roles, relations, and inequalities that could be applied uniformly across cultures (Connelly et al. 1995). This was the case with many of the theoretical models rooted in biological, social, or economic factors, such as those built around nature/culture or production/reproduction dichotomies (Di Leonardo 1991). By the 1990s, these types of all-inclusive approaches to the cross-cultural complexities of gendered lives were largely abandoned, as the immense variability of gender constructions in diverse geographical, cultural, historical, and economic contexts was recognized.

> Constituted by, embedded within, and impacting upon a multitude of economic, demographic, social and cultural processes, gender is inherently diverse and inherently amenable to change. Yet while the rejection of naturalizing and transhistorical conceptualizations of gender is now accepted, we are still at a stage where our understanding of how these complex processes operate, and what they might imply for successive generations, remains stubbornly elusive. (Chant and McIlwaine 1998: 1-2)

It became apparent that the concept of gender could not be cross-culturally explained with a single theory nor was it structured in a globally uniform manner. Currently there is recognition of the need to examine both the similarities and differences in the meaning and practice of being female and being male in different parts of the world, and to look at the situation-specific forces that create these conditions (Chant and McIlwaine 1998:2). There is also an understanding that broad theoretical formulations must be built on a much larger database of information, and thus the methodological focus has been on gathering knowledge and experience of the structure and dynamics of gender in the broadest range of socio-cultural settings and times possible (e.g., Rosenbaum and Eber 1992: Lavrin 1993; Marchand and Parpart 1995; Okeke 1996).

The second theme emerging from recent feminist scholarship that has critical implications for the present study is the debate concerning representation and voice. Arising from the historical dominance of Western researchers in global women's and gender studies, there is a greater awareness of problems of biased perspectives and the absence of Southern voices (Mohanty 1991). While in some circles the debate has reached a level of "insider-outside" or margin-centre" positions (Okeke 1997), this does not reflect the complexity of the circumstances and positions in which we act. The salient principle to emerge from this debate is that as researchers we must be very consciously aware of where we are positioned in relation to our research constituencies, our motivations and frameworks, and the way we listen, record, and represent the voices we hear. As Okeke (1997: 35) points out, the role of the "third eye," or the visitor to a community, can also contribute to learning from his or her unique position, however "ultimately, the spots are on the leopard," that is the community members themselves that define, identify, and represent their position.

Given this perspective, much of the most recent research has focused on the collection, documentation, and interpretation of women's voices (e.g., Rosenbaum and Eber 1992; Bridgman et al. 1999). However, even when special attention is given to amplifying the voices of the women at the centre or the discussion, there is a need for caution. Stephen (1996) points out the need to continually contextualize the voices, rather than reducing them to purely text for analysis. She also reminds us that women's voices themselves are not necessarily "pure, uncontaminated by patriarchal and capitalist and/or other ways of knowing the world" (1996:15), and that our listening and interpreting is also done within a particular framework of purpose, ideology, and power. Thus, even though the research focus is on the retrieval and examination of direct women's voices, this does not free the researcher from the need to carefully consider these other factors that shape the conversations that occur.

Situated within the realm of "applied anthropology," this research project explores the social and cultural effects of economic change occurring globally and regionally, as well as the social and cultural effects of planned economic "development" initiatives (Gardner and Lewis 1996:52). A primary purpose of the exercise is to identify the implications of the research findings for political policy, and internally and externally planned community development initiatives that affect women in rural indigenous communities. Current accepted research strategies in the field of applied anthropology also focus on the importance of broad community participation in the process of data collection and articulation of results (Gardner and Lewis 1996; United Nations 1999).

The methodology utilized in this study aims to take into consideration recent critiques concerning research assumptions and methods. As outlined in the previous chapter, there has been a tendency in social sciences research in recent decades to allocate primacy to economic factors in the explanation of social and cultural phenomena. The narrative, ethnographic approach of this investigation minimizes the likelihood of an economic bias because data collection and analysis encompass the broad spectrum of the social, historical, economic, cultural, and individual forces shaping household and community formations and dynamics.

In an effort to address the problem of power imbalances between the researcher and the researched, a Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach is integrated into the research design. PAR assumes that the main objective of development is the fulfillment of the human urge for creative engagement; and thus aims to stimulate a process of increasing self-development, critical thinking, and self-determination within the local community (Rahman 1993). Thus research is designed to include a cycle of investigation-analysis-action-reflection that involves both the external researcher and the "subjects" of the research in a collective process (Burkey 1993:60-61).

Basic PAR principles are combined with recently emerging concepts in applied anthropology in order to respond to the current debates regarding the representation of others in anthropological work. 'Postmodern applied anthropology' has been described as a reconstruction of applied anthropology (an outsider's effort to help solve posed problems) and interpretative anthropology (an outsider's representation of a cultural system) (Johannsen 1992). Both approaches are essentially interventionist, and built on a relationship of power inequity between the "researcher" and the "researched." In contrast, "postmodern applied anthropology" emphasizes the need for people within the community to represent themselves and identify the nature and solutions of their own problems.

2. Comitancillo as an Ethnographic Research Site

Comitancillo is an instructive research site, despite, and because of, the fact that it has never attracted much scholarly attention. While the Maya of highland Guatemala have been the subject of extensive ethnographic research since the early 1900s by both Guatemalan and foreign social scientists, Comitancillo does not fit the usual profile of communities that draw scholarly consideration.

Historically, ethnographic research has concentrated on the more populated and prominent regions of the Guatemalan highlands, such as Chimaltenango, Quiché, Sololá, and Huehuetenango; and on specific community studies.[1] Anthropological research focused on these particular geographical areas well into the second half of the century.[2] Alternatively, there has been no ethnographic research conducted in the interior highland communities of San Marcos to this date. The three major studies (Smith 1977; Hawkins 1976, 1984; Ehlers 1990a) undertaken in the Department of San Marcos have all focused on San Pedro Sacatepequez, the large market town adjacent to the departmental capital (the town of San Marcos) located at the edge of the highland region. These three studies refer only to the rural indigenous highland communities when discussing San Pedro Sacatepequez's socio-economic and political links with this hinterland region.

In the past two decades, Maya ethnographic research has begun to explore the relationships between communities and their regional and national socio-political contexts; and the historical events that make them dynamic, changing communities rather than stagnant, timeless communities. Given this interest, the more recent research focus has been on communities that have particular significance on the national stage. For example, comprehensive research has been done on Mayan communities with prosperous textile industries (e.g., Annis 1987; Ehlers 1990), those with extensive surviving customary ritual activity (e.g., Warren 1978; Tedlock 1992; Watanabe 1997), and those that suffered exceptional violence during the armed conflict of the past two decades (e.g., Carmack 1988; Stoll 1993; Carlsen 1996; Green 1999).

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[1] For example, LaFarge 1947, research in Santa Eulalia, Huehuetenango in the 1930s; Paul 1974, research in San Pedro Laguna, Sololá in the 1940s; Oakes 1951, in Todos Santos, Huehuetenango; Bunzel 1952, in Chichicastenango, Quiché; Tax 1953, in Panajachel, Sololá.

[2] For example, Davis 1997, research in Santa Eulalia, Huehuetenango in the 1970s; Maynard, 1974 in Palín, Escuintla; Brintnall, 1979 in Aquacatán, Huehuetenango; Annis, 1987 in San Antonio Aguscalientes, Sacatepequez.

In contrast to these better-known highland communities, Comitancillo is representative of many Mayan communities in Guatemala today: geographically isolated, historically unimportant, economically backward, and socially and politically marginalized. Academically, the examination of this type of community contributes to a greater understanding of the range of experience that exists within Mayan communities of the highlands. Practically, the findings of this research project can enhance efforts to facilitate healthy integration and development of the more isolated regions of the Guatemalan highlands into the national and international context.

3. Fieldwork Conditions

My family and I lived and worked in Comitancillo on a community development project sponsored by a Canadian NGO from January 1992 until June 1996 (4.5 years). Out of that experience came the impetus for this study, and the groundwork of knowledge and relationships that made it possible to do the present research in a relatively short period. Direct fieldwork for the present research took place over the course of nine months in 1998-2001. I was in Comitancillo the months of July 1998; June 1999; January-February 2000; May-September 2000; and February 2001.

I lived in several types of accommodations during the fieldwork, and each type of accommodation provided insights for the research project. In June 1999, I lived with a Ladino couple, descendents of one of the oldest Ladino families in the community. Sharing meals with them on a daily basis brought me insights into the perspectives of Ladinos, with whom I had had cordial but less intensive interactions until this point, as my work and studies had always focused on the Mayan residents of the community. In January-February, 2000, I rented a room in a boarding house that was the centre for activity related to illegal migrations and traveling regional salesmen. I ate meals with a mixed Maya-Ladina friend who is an energetic businesswoman, and a source of information on all the happenings in the community. May through September 2000 were spent living in a rented two-room house. As my husband and two children were with me during this period, I participated in different social groups in the community. Picking up where they had left off when we left the community in June 1996, my children played with the neighbourhood kids, going back and forth between houses, the soccer field, and the playground. My husband was involved with the local soccer team, and local improvement and political groups. The last month, February 2001, was again spent renting a room by myself, but eating with various friends in the community.

4. Local Relationships to the Research

I did this research in affiliation with the *Associación Maya-Mam de Investigación y Desarrollo* (AMMID), a grassroots community development organization in Comitancillo. My relationship to the organization is quite close: I was involved in the original formation of this local community organization in the mid-1990s, and participated as an outside facilitator and supporter for several years. Since then AMMID has grown, and is now a mature local organization with a high level of self-determination and independent management. Given my lengthy relationship with the organization, members and staff are much more than colleagues; they are friends and peers in a community development process.

When I approached them with this research idea, the members and staff of AMMID were keen to participate. We prepared an agreement between the organization and myself, outlining the responsibilities and contributions of each party (Appendix A). Formal agreements between community residents/organizations and researchers are becoming more common as peoples all over the world recognize the potential problems in these often-hierarchical research relationships.

The Board of Directors and the AMMID staff formed a Research Advisory Committee, identified appropriate persons for interviews, provided an institutional umbrella for the research project and immediate credibility in the community, loaned space for meetings, and provided research advice and feedback. I attended monthly board meetings of AMMID to keep them apprised of my progress and any issues that had arisen.

A common complaint of research done by foreigners in Guatemalan Maya communities is that the results are rarely available to the community participants. Thus, a central part of the agreement between AMMID and myself was the production of a summary Spanish document to be used by Maya community groups in Guatemala, and other regions with similar socio-economic contexts. They insisted that the findings needed to be published in two formats: one accessible to people with lower levels of literacy and formal education, and another one that would be a complete translation of the academic English version. We will undertake this work when the dissertation is completed.

4.1. Research Advisory Committee

The formation of the Advisory Committee was a very interesting and exciting process. With the assistance of a few key people in AMMID, we selected a diversity of people from the community that would bring the necessary characteristics and background to the project. We looked for a mix of ages, genders, hamlets of origin, and experience. I then met with them individually to discuss the idea with them, and see if they were interested in participating. All of the people we approached agreed. The group included the following:

1) Rubén Feliciano, - from Chicajalaj, married father of two young children, AMMID Coordinator, Master's Degree in Bilingual Education,
2) Sara Ramirez – from Chicajalaj, a single mother of two young children, a student in grade 11 Teacher's College, and formerly a community facilitator with AMMID,
3) María Eulália Jimenez – from Taltimiche, an elderly woman, with five adult daughters, (two of whom are single mothers), and a long time leader in the women's group and in the Catholic church,
4) Petrona Cardona – from Ixmoco, a middle-aged woman, widowed, mother of five children; and an active midwife and healer in the community, and avid story-teller,

5) Isabel Aquilón - from Taltimiche, a middle-aged, mother of seven children, a long time women's group leader, active community leader, and presently President of AMMID,
6) Pedro Ramírez – from Chamaque, an elderly man, with six adult children, a health promoter, and religious leader in the community.

The Research Committee met for a total of six full-day sessions throughout the fieldwork period. The committee helped identity people for interviewing, provided background information, discussed central themes as they arose in the research, and provided important advice on culturally sensitive approaches to the topic and participants. The Committee members also provided feedback and suggestions as the initial data compilation and analysis began. They will also play a central role in the production and distribution of the results in Spanish.

4.2. Issues Arising in the Participatory-Action Research Approach

The Participatory-Action Research approach (PAR) is usually used for research questions that have very direct implications for a community project or problem. It became apparent that it would be difficult to use a straightforward PAR methodology in this particular project because the research questions were somewhat theoretical and their usefulness to the community was indirect: improving an understanding of gender roles and relations, culture change, and development policy and practice do not immediately apply to a particular identified community situation or initiative. It proved impossible to integrate a women's project directly into the research, so the process of designing and accessing funding for a practical project was done as a parallel process to the research itself. I facilitated the contacts, proposal development, and communication between AMMID and a Canadian NGO. In February 2001, the women's groups began a two-year Textile Production Improvement Project in partnership with Change for Children, an Edmonton-based NGO.[3]

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[3] As of June, 2002, the project is progressing well. At the end of May 2002, the Taltimiche women's group inaugurated a new Education and Craft Production Centre that they built, and several groups have purchased industrial sewing machines and initiated production.

5. Data Collection

A combination of research techniques provided the various types of data required for the study, and multiple sources facilitated a cross-verification of findings. The methods used include participant observation, individual taped interviews, focus group discussions, case-study households, and the use of archival and documentary information sources.

One method of ensuring the validity and reliability of data in this particular study was triangulation; that is, the collection of data through multiple methods so that data collected from one source can be compared with data collected with other methods. In this way, information gathered in general interviews was considered in the light of information emerging from the focal group discussions, participant observation, and documentary sources. The intimate involvement of the local research group and community association was another means of ensuring the validity of the results.

5.1. Participant Observation

Participant observation, the hallmark technique of ethnographic research, was used to provide grounding for the research project in general, and to corroborate data gathered in interviews and focal groups. When I was in Comitancillo from 1992-96, the majority of my time was spent in group meetings, project discussions, workshops, and larger community events such as festivals, religious celebrations, and civic occasions. To broaden my understanding of the community, during the fieldwork period I spent more time in individual households, following the daily routine and dynamics, participating in cooking and cultivating tasks, and just visiting. During this fieldwork period, I was freer to spend more time visiting, observing, and absorbing, something that seldom happens when one is pressed by development project timelines and agendas.

Related to participant observation is something I will call "incidental" data collection. I ate most of my meals with a local woman friend of mine. Evenings were spent sitting by her fire discussing what was happening in the community, and who was doing what, or what had happened to whom. Frequently other people joined our evening visits. When I was walking to different *aldeas* (hamlets) to do interviews or visits, different people accompanied me, or joined me on the road; and conversations and discussions about life in the community occurred. This time spent talking with people is not much different from when my family and I lived there in the first half of the 1990s; however, this time I consciously tried to remember the conversations as accurately as possible, and wrote them down when I returned to my room. I was more intentional about asking questions and exploring the meaning of events with people. I realize that this type of information must be used very carefully because it can be viewed as covert data collection, or may be inaccurate and/or biased. However, it stimulated my thinking in areas that I had not previously thought of exploring formally; and provided a wealth of information to corroborate findings in the more formal data collection processes.

5.2. Individual Interviews

A total of 61 interviews with women from Comitancillo were conducted, however four transcripts could not be used because of technical problems in the recording process, so the only 57 were utilized in data analysis. Interviews were between one and three hours in length, and were taped on cassettes. Approximately half of the interviews were conducted in Mam, and half in Spanish. A list of the women interviewed by community and age cohort is included in Appendix B. Nineteen elderly women (over 50 years old), twenty middle-aged (30-50 years old) women, and eighteen young women (20 to 30 years old) were interviewed from eleven sample communities.

Several procedures were used to ensure the most broadly representative sample possible. The eleven *aldeas* used are representative of the Maya communities of the highlands in that they present a range of characteristics such as diversity of location, available services, population size, geographical extent, resource bases, economic activities, and religious and social organization (see map in Appendix B). Before identifying individuals for interviews, selection criteria were established that produced a stratified sample illustrative of geographical, economic, and social variables. A base interview schedule was used to ensure that certain standard information and topics were covered with all participants; however, the interviews were largely open-ended, and participant-directed (Appendix C).

The participatory group process also provided a check to possible researcher bias and influence. Group discussion identified and clarified misunderstandings or unconscious biases on the part of the researcher, and also counterbalanced the possible effects of the researcher on the participants and the interview situation.

The majority of Comitecos speak Spanish, and I speak Spanish fluently. I spent considerable time studying Mam, the local Mayan language; however, I did not achieve acceptable conversational skills in the language. My research associate, Miriam Salvador, a graduate from the local high school, acted as my Mam interpreter for all the interviews, and transcribed the Mam tapes into Spanish.

A general interview schedule was used to guide the interviews and ensure that some standard comparable data was gathered (Appendix C). However, it quickly became apparent that a more open-ended, conversational approach was the most effective in facilitating the women's expression of their perspectives on what they regarded as important in their lives.

5.3. Ethical and Consent Considerations

Certification of Ethical Acceptability was granted for this study by the Faculty of Arts Human Research Ethics Committee at the University of Alberta (Appendix D). The Research Ethics Statement of this research project covers issues related to potential harm to participants, informed consent, anonymity, appropriate use of the results, support personnel, and compensation.

The extensive participation of the local community organization in this project provided an additional ethical check for the research. The research design and implementation were finalized in collaboration with the local participants, thus ensuring, as much as possible, the appropriateness of the research objectives and methods.

After a description of the research project and its implications for participants, literate informants signed a written consent form. In addition, consent was explained and agreement was taped at the beginning of each interview to ensure that language or literacy abilities did not cause misunderstandings. Because few of the participants were literate, the majority were taped oral consents.

An unforeseen challenge was the dynamic of interviewing elderly Mam women. I had interviewed approximately ten young women in the summer of 1999, without any difficulty; in fact, the interviews with the young women often evolved into lengthy confidential conversations regarding their hopes, dreams, and struggles. In contrast, the tone of the interviews with the elderly women was very different; there was considerably more suspicion and lack of confidence. This could be because the first few women that Miriam Salvador and I interviewed did not know me previously; many of the problems disappeared when I interviewed women that I knew from 1992-96.

We found that the best way to do the interviews was to not take written notes, but rather just use the small tape recorder; the act of taking notes seemed to intimidate the women, while the tape recorder was quite unobtrusive, and soon forgotten. Obtaining informed consent was also more difficult with the elderly women because it was difficult to explain to them what we were doing, as they had limited experience of the world beyond their communities. We did our utmost to explain the process and ensure that it was respectful and reciprocal.

5.4. Focus Groups

Focus group discussions on specific topics took place in planned sessions such as the advisory group meetings, plenary sessions of the AMMID Board, and general membership meetings, as well as other group meetings in the *aldeas,* such as in Ixmoco, Taltimiche, and Chamaque. In various formal and informal settings the progress of the research was shared, and responses recorded. Of course informal discussions occurred unexpectedly in many places and at many times. Although the planned formal discussions were recorded on tape and transcribed, in the majority of the cases I took notes during or immediately after an informal or spontaneous dialogue took place.

5.5. Household Activity Records

In order to gather information about household economic decision-making, scheduling, and management, seven families were selected for a closer examination of daily household patterns of activity (Appendix E). The families were selected to represent the various combinations of economic activities undertaken by Comiteco families to meet their subsistence needs, such as basic agriculture, craft production, wage labour, professional work, and dependence on remittances from the United States. A diversity of family compositions were also selected, including families with children, extended family households, a widow, and a single mother.

My research associate completed a registry of the activities of all the household members on the same day (i.e., the first Wednesday of the month) every two months for the duration of 2000. Thus there are records for February, April, June, August, and October, tracking seasonal cycles within the household. The families selected were ones known intimately by the researcher and the research associate so that there was a confident relationship for discussion. I also carried out additional interviews with each family to discuss family finances and decision-making processes that were not readily apparent in the household registries.

5.6. Archival and Documentary Sources

Archival research was conducted to support and illuminate the data collected by other means. There is an extensive body of ethnographic literature concerning the Guatemala Maya; and although there are few direct references to women, there is considerable background and general information to be gleaned from these texts.

Several days were spent in the libraries of Rafael Landivar University in Quetzaltenango and San Carlos University in San Marcos, reviewing the theses that have been done on topics related to the present topic. I also spent several days in the extensive library at the Centro de Investigaciones Regionales de Meso-América (CIRMA), a centre for research in Antigua, Guatemala, that is supported by both North American and Central American scholars. This library had a variety of useful texts that I have not encountered elsewhere.

5.6.1. Comitancillo Municipal Archives

The title "Municipal Archives" may be somewhat misleading, as it is just a small room in which all the old papers and documents of the municipal government have been stored, in no particular order and with no particular care. During the research process, I was able to sort through the most relevant documents and organize them into file boxes according to topic and date. The following types of documents were found:

- Land Titles – I reviewed the documentation on land titles that began in 1908 with the passing of a state law requiring titles for land that was previously communal. I reviewed all the documents; but recorded only observations of interest, and made copies of titles that included women as owners of land.
- Municipal Sessions – Minutes of the meetings of the municipal council date back to 1922. I reviewed these documents, recording observations relevant to the research theme and making copies of records of direct importance.
- Financial Books – The account books of the municipal government are the oldest documents in the Archives, beginning in 1879. Although these documents record a minimal amount of data, there is much interesting information that can be gleaned directly and indirectly from studying them. I recorded and copied the information relevant for this project.
- Fines (*Sentencias Económicas)* – The Archives contained records of cases brought before the municipal judges from 1920 to 1968. These largely dealt with disorderly public conduct, abuse within the household, and petty theft. Since many of the cases documented women charging male relatives with abuse, I recorded data on a systematic sample of three cases for each year for the 48-year period.
- Miscellaneous Documents - There were a variety of miscellaneous documents. Perhaps the most remarkable were the books in which the forced labour obligations of the Comitecos were recorded. This was work on roads for the state and on coffee plantations owned by large land- owners from the 1930s to the 1950s. These books listed the names, home community, days of labour required, and where people worked.

5.6.2. General Archives of Central America, Guatemala City

The Archivo General de Centro América (AGCA) in Guatemala City holds documents dated from the arrival of the Spanish, throughout the Colonial Period, and up to the present. I utilized the following resources from these archives:

- Documents of the *Jefetura Política* – The papers of the departmental government of San Marcos are archived in the AGCA in bundles according to year. As I did not have enough time to go through every year, and this research project is not specifically a historical endeavour, I decided to do a sample. I chose to look at 1908 1918 1928 1938, and 1948. These records provided an overview of the changing issues and characteristics of the Municipality of Comitancillo. I specifically chose these years because I wanted to investigate the year 1918, when a devastating influenza epidemic (part of the worldwide epidemic at the end of the First World War) killed more than 900 people in two weeks in Comitancillo. The archives were very rewarding in terms of information on the epidemic period and its effects on Comitancillo, as well as the other decades of the first half of the twentieth century.
- Other Documents - I also investigated older documents specifically concerning Comitancillo and its immediate neighbours; for example, the nineteenth century correspondence related to communal land boundaries and territory, and complaints to the state about Ladino-indigenous relations.

6. Data Analysis

The material gathered in the interviews was transcribed from the tapes into written form in Spanish or Mam and then Spanish. The transcripts were then examined to identify common predominant themes and questions, and to search for patterns. As much as possible, transcripts were transcribed and reviewed as soon as they become available, so that emerging data could inform subsequent interviews and questions, a "grounded theorizing" process that facilitates the analysis of data (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Hammersley and Atkinson 1995:205-238). In-depth content analysis was done by hand while in the field; and upon return to Canada, using NUDIST, a qualitative data analysis program.

Chapter Three
Comitancillo: The Case Study Community

1. Introduction

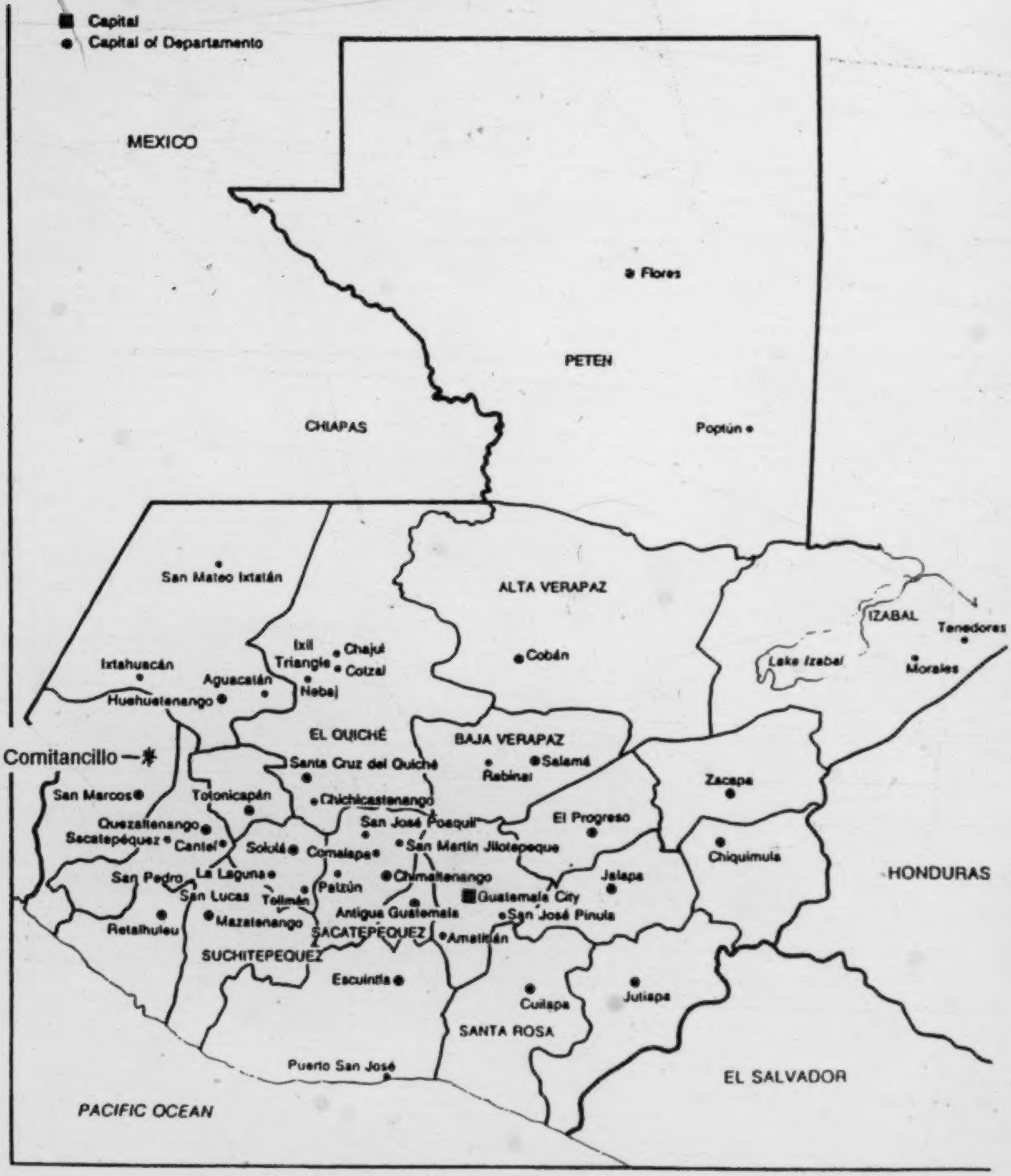
This chapter contains a brief outline of the history of Comitancillo during the twentieth century, situating the lives and stories of three generations of Comiteca women within the geographical and historical context. More detailed descriptions and analysis of the nature and functioning of certain aspects of the community structure, such as agriculture work patterns, the community justice system, and land rights, will appear in later chapters as they relate to specific aspects of women's lives.

2. Geographical Setting

Comitancillo is a Mam-speaking Mayan community. The Mam are one of the language groups occupying present-day southern Guatemala, numbering an estimated 500,000 out of a total Mayan population of about six million (Feliciano 1996:24). Although the Mam presently inhabit the Departments of Huehuetenango, San Marcos, and Quetzaltenango, the focus here is limited to the Mam of the highland region of the Department of San Marcos, where Comitancillo is located (Maps 1 and 2). For identification purposes, the region will be referred to as the San Marcos Highlands, even though the "San Marcos" designation originates in the colonial period.

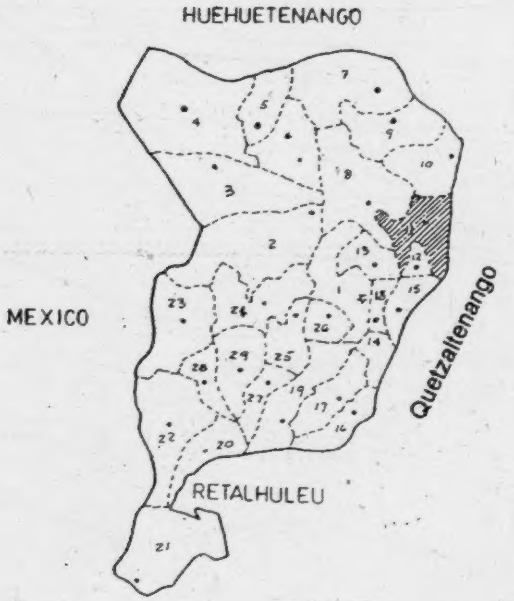
The San Marcos Highlands are situated in the southern range of the two parallel ranges that form the Sierra Madre Mountains running across Guatemala from west to east (Map 3). The southern range is also divided into two parallel formations; a series of connected intermontane basins, which lie directly north of the geologically younger, and still active, volcanic axis. This southern chain of volcanoes is the edge of the slope down to the Pacific Coast. The intermontane basins have some of the richest soils and largest extensions of relatively flat land for cultivation in the highland region. These basins include the San Marcos/San Pedro, Quetzaltenango, Totonicapán, and Nahualá valleys. The largest Indian populations live in these basins because of the superior farming conditions. The second sub-section, lying immediately to the north of these active volcanoes and fertile basins, is an older, eroded volcanic range called the Old Cordillera

Map 1: Comitancillo in the National Context
(Reproduced with permission from Smith 1990:10)


■ Capital
● Capital of Departamento
MEXICO
Flores
PETEN
CHIAPAS
Poptún
San Mateo Ixtatán
ALTA VERAPAZ
IZABAL
Tenedores
Ixil Triangle
Chajul
Cotzal
Nebaj
Cobán
Lake Izabal
Morales
Ixtahuacán
Aguacatán
Huehuetenango
EL QUICHÉ
BAJA VERAPAZ
Comitancillo
Santa Cruz del Quiché
Rabinal
Salamá
San Marcos
Totonicapán
Chichicastenango
Zacapa
San José Poaquil
El Progreso
Quezaltenango
Sacatepéquez
Cantel
Sololá
Comalapa
San Martín Jilotepeque
Chiquimula
San Pedro
La Laguna
Patzún
Chimaltenango
Jalapa
HONDURAS
San Lucas
Tolimán
Guatemala City
Retalhuleu
Mazatenango
Antigua Guatemala
San José Pinula
SACATEPEQUEZ
Amatitlán
SUCHITEPEQUEZ
Escuintla
Cuilapa
Jutiapa
SANTA ROSA
Puerto San José
EL SALVADOR
PACIFIC OCEAN

Unless shown, departments have the same name as their capitals.

Map 2: Municipalities of the Department of San Marcos
(Reproduced with permission from Feliciano 1996:2)


HUEHUETENANGO
MEXICO
Quetzaltenango
RETALHULEU
1
2
3
4
5
7
8
9
10
12
13
14
15
16
17
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22
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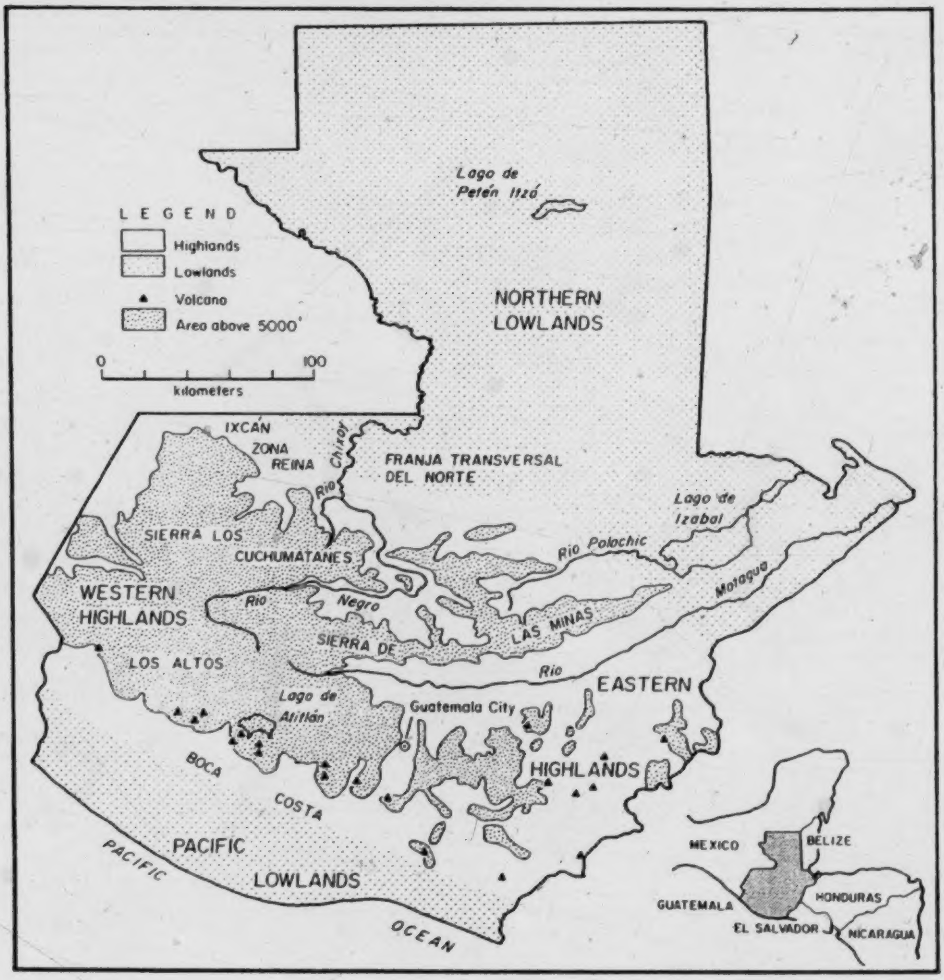
28
29

1. San Marcos
2. Tajamulco
3. Sibinal
4. Tacana
5. San José Ojetenam
6. Ixchiguan
7. Concepción Tutuapa
8. Tejutla
9. San Miquel Ixtahuacan
10. Sipacapa
11. Comitancillo
12. Rio Blanco
13. San Lorenzo
14. San Cristobal Cucho
15. San Antonio Sacatepequez
16. El Quetzal
17. La Reforma
18. San Pedro Sacatepequez
19. Nuevo Progreso
20. Pajapita
21. Ocos
22. Tecun Uman
23. Malacatan
24. San Pablo
25. San Rafael Pie de la Cuesta
26. Esquipulas Palo Gordo
27. Tumbador
28. Santa Catarina
29. El Rodeo

Map 3: Natural Geographic Regions of Guatemala
(Reproduced with permission from Smith 1990:8)


LEGEND
Highlands
Lowlands
Volcano
Area above 5000'
0
100
kilometers
Lago de Petén Itzá
NORTHERN LOWLANDS
IXCÁN
ZONA REINA
Rio Chixoy
FRANJA TRANSVERSAL DEL NORTE
Lago de Izabal
Rio Polochic
SIERRA LOS CUCHUMATANES
WESTERN HIGHLANDS
Rio Negro
Motagua
SIERRA DE LAS MINAS
Rio
LOS ALTOS
Lago de Atitlán
Guatemala City
EASTERN HIGHLANDS
BOCA COSTA
PACIFIC LOWLANDS
PACIFIC OCEAN
MEXICO
BELIZE
GUATEMALA
HONDURAS
EL SALVADOR
NICARAGUA

or the Continental Divide Range (McBryde 1947:6). This region includes most of highland San Marcos, upland Totonicapán, and the modern Department of Quiché. In this region the soils are only moderately fertile; and because of the altitude, the climate is considerably cooler.

The San Marcos Highlands lie within the Sierra Madre range, and include both types of physiology. Tajamulco, the highest volcano in Central America (4220 metres above sea level, and visible from Comitancillo), and the Tacaná Volcano (4064 metres) are relatively recently active volcanoes. There are records of several eruptions of Tajamulco before 1800 (Dutton and Hobbs 1943:7). The San Marcos/ San Pedro valley (2350 metres) is one of the fertile, densely settled basins of the highlands. The region immediately north of the two volcanoes is part of the older Continental Divide Range. The entire region lies between 2000-4000 metres above sea level. Valleys, ravines, streams, rivers, and small plateaus dissect the irregular terrain.

The Municipality of Comitancillo straddles one of these broad valleys, broken by steep ravines and overshadowed by mountainous peaks. Covering an area of 113 square kilometers, the Municipality ranges in altitude from 2,000 meters above sea level at the bottom of the main river valley to close to 3,000 meters at the highest peaks. The majority of the land has slopes too steep or soil too marginal for agriculture; only about one-third of the land is cultivatable.

Climate in the highland region of Guatemala is largely determined by altitude. Between sea level and 800 metres elevation is a micro-climate known as *tierra caliente*: that is, a warm tropical climate with distinct wet and dry seasons. From 800 to 2000 metres elevation is located the *tierra templada* climatic zone: moderate temperatures year-round and an abundant wet season, the ideal conditions for coffee cultivation. Above 2000 metres elevation, *tierra fría* conditions predominate: a cooler climate with distinct wet and dry seasons. The San Marcos Highlands in general, and Comitancillo in particular, fall largely within the *tierra fría* climatic zone. This environment has a cool, temperate climate with a dry season from November to April, and plentiful rainfall in the wet season from May through October. In the wet season, clear morning skies are followed by showers in the afternoon or evening. The year-round mean temperature is between 15 and 20 degrees Celsius.

The abundance of natural resources existent in the Guatemalan highlands region has been cited as an optimum setting for the growth of a complex civilization (Borhegyi 1964a:5; Sharer 1994:20). The fertile soil of volcanic origin, the abundant rainfall, and mild/moderate climate provide the ingredients for the development of agriculture. The original flora of the area contained the wild forebears of the food plants eventually domesticated in the region, such as maize, beans, and squash. The region also has considerable mineral resources, water, forests, and useful plants and animals.

However, these favourable conditions that exist elsewhere in Guatemala are not as apparent in the San Marcos Highlands in general, and in Comitancillo in particular. The high altitudes, mediocre soils, cool climate, and scarcity of level land for cultivation do not provide ideal conditions for the inception of agriculture. The environmental conditions and the present dearth of archaeological evidence of sedentary subsistence in the Guatemalan highlands until into the Pre-classic period (i.e., after 1500 B.C.) suggest that the practice of agriculture may have expanded into the region after first being initiated in the warmer, level, coastal areas and the more temperate valleys of the central Guatemalan Highlands (Sharer 1994:51).

In contrast to the poor agricultural potential of the region, the San Marcos Highlands do have considerable mineral resources (McBryde 1947:54-72). Three pottery-producing areas exist in the region: San Miguel Ixtahuacán, Sipacapa, and Comitancillo, indicating the availability of suitable clay in the Highlands. Tajamulco is noted as an important producer of *manos* and *metates*, grinding stones for preparing maize. These are usually made from basaltic rock (Sharer 1994:28), one source of which is found in Tajamulco. Lime, indispensable for cooking maize, for use as fertilizer, and for construction, is available in several locations in the San Marcos highlands, including Comitancillo. There is also an obsidian deposit on the edge of the valley of San Marcos/San Pedro. Obsidian was utilized by the ancient Maya to make sharp cutting tools (Sharer 1994:28).

3. Comitancillo before 1900

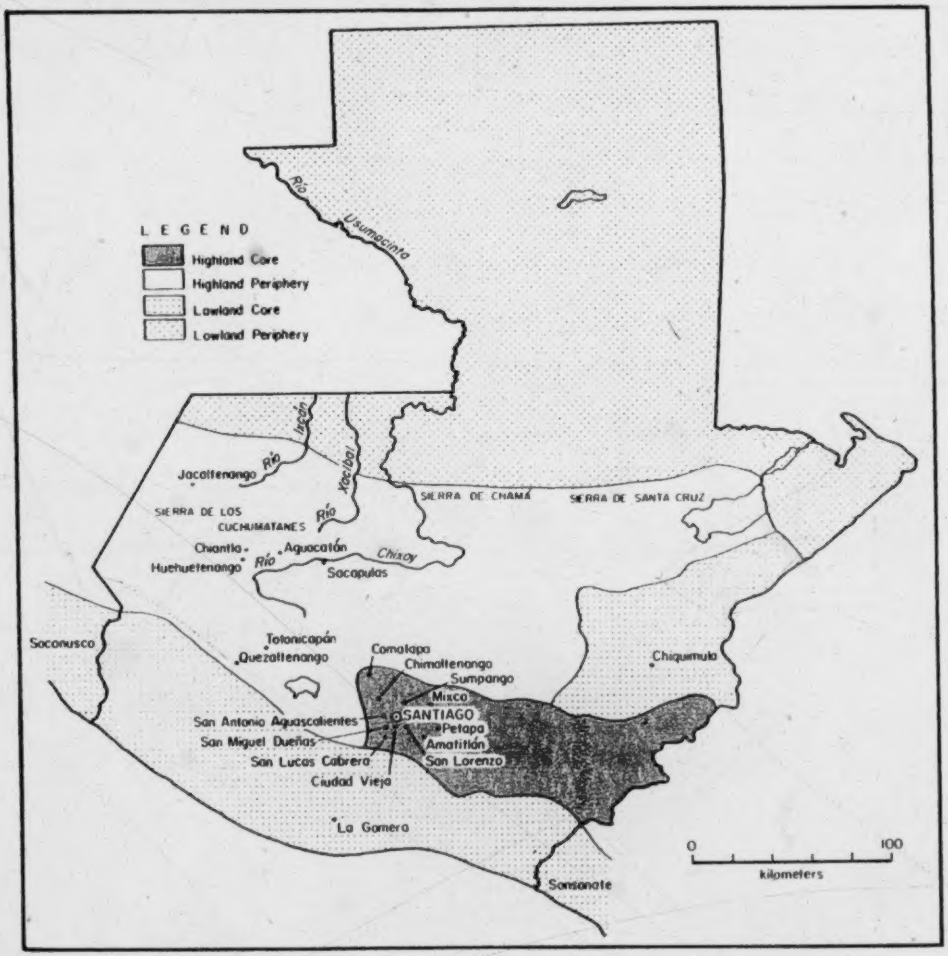
The San Marcos highlands in general, and Comitancillo in particular, have always been on the periphery of the centres of regional economic and political power, and marginal to the ebbs and flows of political power. Geographical barriers and harsh climatic conditions were obstacles to integration into larger political entities; and the region's sparse population, meager natural resources, and poor agricultural land deterred systematic efforts of outsider settlement. In pre-conquest Mayan civilization (before 1524), the region was largely outside the immediate reach of the most powerful centralized political and economic centres, although definitely part of the late flowering Mam nation in the fifteenth century (Sharer 1994; Woodbury and Trik 1953). During the Spanish colonial period (1525-1815) the San Marcos highlands region was again of marginal economic and strategic value within the empire (Map 4), and thus retained its backwater status despite initial attempts to establish *encomiendas* in the region in the early sixteenth century, and the establishment of a Roman Catholic parish by the Mercedians (Lutz and Lovell 1990; Kramer 1994). Independence from Spain in 1821 and the establishment of the Republic of Guatemala in 1838 did not have an immediate impact on the region. Political struggles between conservative and liberal forces in the newly forming nation state occupied the attention of the government for the first decades of independence, and the communities of the San Marcos highlands continued their remote peasant lifestyle with few disturbances (Watanabe 1997:236)

4. Comitancillo in the Twentieth Century

4.1. Population and Settlement

Population data for Comitancillo is meager, and sometimes contradictory; however, general population patterns are evident. In the early colonial period the population is estimated at 66 people, based on tributary data (Lovell and Swezey 1982:75). This figure appears to be very low; it could represent only a partial count of the total population in the area or it could reflect the drastic population decline after the arrival of the Spanish. Population recovery from the ravages of conquest and colonization was slow throughout the colonial period. In 1770 the population was recorded as 450; and by 1806, near the end of the colonial period, it was recorded as 1,279

Map 4: Core and Periphery in Colonial Guatemala
(Reproduced with permission from Lutz & Lovell 1990:37)


LEGEND
Highland Core
Highland Periphery
Lowland Core
Lowland Periphery
Río Usumacinta
Río Ixcán
Río Xacibal
Jacaltenango
SIERRA DE LOS CUCHUMATANES
Chiantla
Huehuetenango
Río
Aguacatán
Río Chixoy
Sacapulas
SIERRA DE CHAMÁ
SIERRA DE SANTA CRUZ
Soconusco
Totonicapán
Quezaltenango
Comalapa
Chimaltenango
Sumpango
Mixco
SANTIAGO
Petapa
Amatitlán
San Lorenzo
San Antonio Aguascalientes
San Miguel Dueñas
San Lucas Cabrera
Ciudad Vieja
Chiquimula
La Gomera
Sonsonate
0
100
kilometers

(Feliciano 1996:67). In 1880, at the beginning of the liberal reforms in Guatemala, Comitancillo had a population of about 3,000 people (Feliciano 1996:67). Exponential population growth began in the twentieth century. In the forty years from 1880 to 1921, the Comitancillo population more than tripled, reaching 10,416 in 1921 (Adams 1997:327). Oddly, sources are somewhat confusing here, because in 1955, the population is still recorded at only 10,905 (Feliciano 1996:67). Table 1 illustrates the population growth of the municipality in the twentieth century, arriving at approximately 50,000 in the year 2000.

Table 1: Population of Comitancillo 1880-2002

Date	Total Population
1880	3,000
1921	10,416*
1955	10,905
1964	14,627
1973	18,619
1980	26,736
1989	39,105
1991	40,500
1995	42,924**
2000	48,840**
2002	51,351***

All data and reference sources from Feliciano 1996:67 except where otherwise indicated. *Adams 1997:327; **Municipal Office of Comitancillo; ***INE 2002.

Two main types of settlement patterns have been identified in the Mayan highlands of Guatemala: "town nucleus" and "vacant-centre" (Lovell 1992:24-25). In the "town nucleus" pattern, most of the residents live in the town centre and walk to their outlying fields to work. In contrast, according to the elderly residents of Comitancillo, a "vacant-centre" pattern of settlement existed in the community until the early twentieth century; that is, the population lived dispersed throughout the municipality, and only visited the town centre for weekly Sunday markets, occasional special celebrations, and municipal business. The main plaza in Comitancillo was (and is) flanked by the Municipal Building on the east side; and the Catholic church is opposite it, on the west side. On the north side, between the church and the municipal building, were permanent market stalls. In the 1940s, a large market building was added.

Until the turn of the century, the only non-Maya residents in Comitancillo were the occasional visiting Roman Catholic clergy and state official. However, around 1900 the first few families of Ladinos arrived in Comitancillo. The Reyna family consisted of three brothers who emigrated from the neighbouring town of Tejutla. According to a grandson of one of these brothers, they were originally from Mexico; and came to Comitancillo seeking their fortunes. They accumulated significant land holdings, established a water-powered mill, cultivated tobacco, and operated a blacksmith shop. They quickly came to hold key positions of authority in the community, and built a large traditional Spanish-style house on the south side of the main plaza.

Along the main road extending from the plaza past the Reyna household was the De León house. The De León family arrived from Salcajá, a town of Spanish immigrants known then (and now) for its weaving industry. In Comitancillo, the De León family established a weaving workshop, with several looms producing the traditional dark blue *corte* worn in the community. In 1913, four De León siblings registered this piece of land as inheritance from their father, who died prematurely. The Rodas family also settled in Comitancillo in the first decade of the century, establishing their house next to the De León family, along the main street. Members of this family took up work as farmers, business operators, and school teachers.

Other than these Ladino families that settled in Comitancillo at the turn of the century, there has been relatively little in-migration into the community. According to the national census conducted in that year, by 1921, 0.4 percent of the population of the municipality was Ladino; in other words, about 50 people out of a population of 10,000. In 1964 there were 143 Ladinos in a population of 10,000 (Feliciano 1996:67). Even in 1975, the number of Ladino families was estimated to be only ten families within a total municipal population of 18,619 (Hawkins 1975:302-303). There has been an increase in the number of Ladinos working within the expanding education, health, and government systems in the last three decades; however, today Ladinos are still less than 1% of the total population, estimated at less than 400 Ladinos in a total municipal population of 50,000 (Feliciano 1996:69).

4.2. Key Aspects of Political and Economic Development

The municipality of Comitancillo covers an area of 113 square kilometers of mountainous, difficult terrain. Engineer Luis Aquilar, sent to survey the community in 1908, included an informative description of Comitancillo in the first decade of the twentieth century in his final report.

> [Comitancillo has] an extensive territory ... but the land is almost useless because the soil is stony and sandy, and the terrain is very broken. There is very little flat, cultivatable land. The population is numerous, and known to be active and hardworking; however, the land does not offer them compensation for their work. The climate is cold, since the lowest point is higher than 7000 feet above sea level. While maize, wheat and oats are cultivated on a small scale, it does not meet the needs of the region because of the poor quality of the land".[1]

Historical records indicate that Comitancillo was one of the least productive highland municipalities in the Department of San Marcos in terms of crop cultivation and harvest.[2] The harsh, high-altitude pastures and the broken terrain of Comitancillo were not appropriate for abundant crop cultivation.

Conversely, the region was suitable for extensive animal husbandry, particularly sheep. References from the eighteenth century (Gall 1976), describe Comitancillo as having very large sheep herds and some cattle as well.[3] A report sent to San Marcos in 1918 indicated that Comitancillo had 7,673 male sheep and 9,988 female sheep.[4] At the time, only one other municipality in the San Marcos highlands produced more sheep than Comitancillo.[5] Comitancillo also had more other types of livestock than other municipalities in the San Marcos highlands; reporting 178 horses, 264 steers, 50 cows, 3500 pigs, and a few mules and donkeys in 1918.

In the early decades of the twentieth century, Comitancillo began to feel the full impact of the Liberal reformist economic policies and the authoritarian political regimes that dominated the country between 1871 and 1920. In order to follow the path of modem state development such as that in Europe and the United States, the Guatemalan government focused on the development of a centralized state, an export coffee industry, and privatized land ownership; and it stressed the growth of educational, communication, legal, and military structures in the country.

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[1] ACGA, *Jefetura Político de San Marcos* 1908

[2] Crop production was poor; in 1918 Comitancillo reports to have a total of 16,700 *cuerdas* of maize, 3,430 *cuerdas* of wheat, 495 of lima beans, 220 of oats, 148 of black beans.

[3] Archbishop Doctor Pedro Cortés y Larraz came from Tejutla to visit in 1770.

[4] AGCA, *Jefetura Político de San Marcos 19*18

[5] The municipality of Ojetenam had 7000 male and 14,000 female sheep: AGCA *Jefetura Político de San Marcos* 1918

4.2.1. Local Government

Throughout most of the twentieth century, Comitancillo municipal government has consisted of a male Mam mayor and council (called *regidores* and *sindicales* or *síndicos)* and Ladino bureaucrats (see Appendix F for a chronology of municipal government officials). Each *aldea* or *caserio* also appoints a community representative, *auxiliar,* on an annual basis; the position was rotated among the adult men of the community. The *auxiliar's* function was to carry news and information between the community and the municipal office, represent the *aldea or caserio* in dealings with the municipal authorities, collect taxes and contributions as required, and act as a legal authority within the community.

The municipal secretary and treasurer were key positions held by a Ladino or part-Mam man because the positions required extensive literacy and accounting skills, as well as fluent Spanish. He acted as the interpreter for the community with the small local Ladino population and institutions of the State. All the Municipal records, correspondence, and accounting are in Spanish; indeed, Mam was not a written language at the time. Most of the Municipal documents are signed by the Municipal Secretary for the Mayor, "*quien ignora firmar*" [who doesn't know how to sign] as was the case of all the mayors until the 1930s.[6]

In addition to the Ladinos who occupied the secretary and treasurer positions, men from the newly arrived Ladino families in Comitancillo quickly assumed other key positions that linked the community with the outside world. For example, in 1915 Sessions of the Municipality, Eusebio Reyna is recorded as holding the following positions: Chief of Police, Sub-Director of Roads, President of the Local Agriculture Committee, and Director of the Police.[7] In 1918, he also undertook the role of chief health official during the devastating influenza epidemic that swept the municipality.

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[6] Comitancillo Municipal Sessions 1922-1930
[7] Comitancillo Municipal Sessions 1915

Prior to the 1940s, the mayor and the municipal council members were not elected; rather they were selected in the *aldeas*. Those selected tended to be prominent leaders in the communities, usually from the largest *aldeas* (Chicajalaj, Tuichelupe, Tuimuj). It is unclear if they were selected based on the traditional civil-religious hierarchy system as in many Maya communities, or if election was more informal.

In 1935, President Ubico instituted a system of *Intendentes* named by the Executive of the government to manage the affairs of the municipalities, and as a means of increasing central control of the municipalities. The archives of Comitancillo register this change, as all documents are signed by *Intendentes* between 1935 and 1945.

Then in 1945, after the overthrow of the Ubico regime and the establishment of the Arevalo government, a system of open political elections was implemented in the highland municipalities (Handy 1990:167). Simultaneously, while the new government policies aimed to reduce economic disparities and oppression, they also weakened the socio-political autonomy and isolation that the Maya had maintained within the parameters of their local communities. The traditional civil-religious hierarchies and local systems of appointing local political authorities that had governed the communities for centuries were slowly replaced by national party politics and formal election processes (Carlsen 1997). This development is reflected in Comitancillo in the installation of the first formally elected mayor and council in 1947, although candidates appear to continue to be from the same pool of higher status Mayan families as before. The portion of the population that participated in these elections was small; for example, the electoral register of 1959 lists less than 1000 men eligible to vote out of a total population of about 12,000. Apart from two Ladino mayors in the late 1950s and in the 1960s (Daniel Muñoz 1956-1959, 1966-67; Moises Rodas De León 1959-1960), all of the mayors have been, and continue to be Maya. Currently, the municipal council is made up of the mayor, five *regidores,* two *síndicos,* and five alternatives.

With the imposition of a formal electoral process, national politics became incorporated into local Comitancillo government, as candidates were associated with national political parties. While the number of Comitecos involved in party politics, like the number who actually voted, was likely quite small, it is interesting to note that in 1951 two chapters of the *Partido Acción Revolucionaria* (PAR - The Revolutionary Action Party, one of the parties that supported Arévalo and Arbenz 1945-54) were formed in Comitancillo. On November 20 1951, in the inaugural meeting of the group in Tuichelupe, the minutes of the meeting indicate that they wanted to affiliate with the PAR "because it is a very healthy party and defender of the Revolution of October 20 1944".[8]

Comitancillo does not appear to have been integrated into the nation's modernizing and expanding military structure until the 1940s. Perhaps because of its isolation, Comitancillo did not house a military station in 1928 as did several other neighbouring highland municipalities (Tejutla, San Lorenzo, and Tacana),[9] and recruitment for military service appears to be very sporadic throughout the first half of the century. In 1914, only two recruits from Comitancillo are recorded out of a total of 232 from the entire department.[10] There are occasional notes in the municipal sessions that the municipality is required to send recruits to San Marcos, such as on July 18 1930, a request is recorded for the municipality to send three indigenous soldiers. One elderly Comiteca woman described her husband's very arbitrary recruitment this way:

> My husband would go with my father-in-law to the coast to work on a *finca* named The Australia. They would buy tomatoes, onions, and so on in San Pedro and sell them on the coast. Unfortunately, my husband was on his way to this place when soldiers captured him, and he had to go do military service in the capital of Guatemala [in the 1940s]. My husband had to do service for one and a half years, and so I stayed alone with my parents-in-law. – Josefa, 75

In the 1960s military commissioners were designated in each community to oversee this process; and by 1996, there were approximately 180 military commissioners in Comitancillo, an average of three per *aldea,* who are elected by the community to facilitate the process of recruitment. Unfortunately, the unpredictable patterns of the military recruitment of young men that characterized the community over the past century continue today. During the 1990s, bribery, corruption, kinship and patronage links, all contribute to determine who ultimately completes military service; and *agaradas* (captures) occasionally take place when military officials arrive in the community to take away the young men whose names have been submitted by the commissioners.[11]

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[8] Minutes of the Meetings of the Partido Acción Revolucionaria de Tuichelupe, Comitancillo, Nov. 20 1951, Comitancillo Municipal Archives.

[9] Comitancillo Municipal Sessions 1928

[10] AGCA, *Jefatura Politico de San Marcos 19*14.

The justice system in Comitancillo was integrated into the municipal council throughout the twentieth century, with the local tribunal hearing the majority of cases, while more serious charges, such as murder, were referred to the Departmental Court in San Marcos. Records of the proceedings of the local justice tribunal from 1921 to 1968 exist in the municipality and are reviewed in chapter four. It was not until 1993 that an official Justice of the Peace office was opened in Comitancillo, staffed by government lawyers. The operation of the local justice system will be discussed in greater detail in chapter four, when cases throughout the century are examined as to the evidence they provide about women's lives.

4.2.2. Land Ownership and Access Patterns

One of the most critical changes in the socio-economic structure of the highland Maya communities during the early decades of the twentieth century concerned land ownership patterns. During the colonial period and the first decades of republican rule, land ownership in Guatemala was largely of two types. In the central, more fertile regions, particularly those surrounding the capital city and the adjacent large flat valleys, the core region, there were large estates owned by Ladinos and the descendants of the original colonial elite (Map 3). Elsewhere in the country, there were occasional estates of this type; however, the majority of the land in the highlands was owned collectively by specific Maya communities.

While in the Spanish colonial period there had been a minimum of order enforced in the rural areas, during the mid-nineteenth century the new republican government was very weak, and land disputes in the highlands intensified (McCreery 1990:101-102). This was definitely the case for Comitancillo. The region was officially recognized as a Maya community in 1763, and granted a land title by the Spanish colonial regime; but by the mid-nineteenth century, Comitancillo's land title had disappeared. According to a letter sent by the people of Comitancillo to the government authorities in Quetzaltenango on November 30, 1841,[12] the formal land title for Comitancillo had been lost many years before. Thus throughout the mid-nineteenth century there were on-going disputes about the land that Comitancillo claimed as part of its *ejido* (collective land base) (Appendix F). Demands, accusations, and requests went back and forth between all levels of government, contesting the boundaries with the surrounding communities. As the Comitecos state in one letter:

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[11] The author's husband witnessed one such capture of young men in June 1993, when a military truck arrived in town and began rounding up young men in the market place. Many hid or attempted to escape, as others were forcefully taken.

> Our community is surrounded by eight communities that each have an *ejido*. Now we want to express the following case: individuals from the community of San Lorenzo, being a *hacienda* (estate), that does not merit the name of town, are taking pieces of land that pertain to us the indigenous peoples... [We are] miserable Indians, who do not have other elements for subsistence than the land we cultivate with our own hands... and if deprived of this, we will be reduced to the extreme of honorable destitution; based on consideration of the reasons expressed here, General Lorenzo, measure out preference to our lands, that we have possessed since time immemorial. In justice we request, and implore, Signed for us by our Secretary, José Crisostomo.[13]

In an effort to settle this and the other boundaries disputes between Comitancillo and its neighbours, the government sent an engineer, Luis Aquilar in 1908 to survey and document the boundaries of the municipality[14]. His final report of the three-month (May-July 1908) surveying projects states that the boundaries were determined, demarcated, and formally documented to the satisfaction of all involved; and that the boundary conflicts with San Lorenzo, Tejutla, and Sipacapa were resolved.

However, the ink on the Community Land Title was barely dry when state legislation proclaimed in 1908 that all land in Guatemala must have individual titles. This action not only negated all the community lands held collectively by the Mayan communities, but opened the door to a land grab by outsiders. While the Maya held the land collectively, they farmed as separate household units, and passed on de facto land rights from one generation to the next. In addition there were some designated communal pastures and forests that all residents could utilize.

The process of registering land to individuals began in Comitancillo in 1908. About 20 volumes of large leather-bound books of hand-written land titles are currently held in the

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[12] AGCA B100.1 Exp. 33263 Leg. 1419, Nov. 30 1841

[13] AGCA B100.1 Exp. 33263 Leg. 1419, Nov. 30, 1841

[14] AGCA *Cartas del Jefe Político de San Marcos* 1909

Comitancillo municipal archives covering the years 1908 through 1920. The titles are lengthy documents that contain detailed descriptions of the land and boundaries using natural visible landmarks and adjacent owners as references because no surveying equipment was used. The documents are written by the Municipal Secretary (mostly Nicolás Ramirez in this period) in Spanish, and witnessed by the municipal authorities. Because the Maya could not read or write Spanish, their agreement to the document is affirmed by an ink thumbprint.

The following is an example of a land title from this period.

> Number 36
> In the town of Santa Crúz Comitancillo on the fifth day of March of 1915 the Municipal Secretary in the presence of the witnesses approved by law and of my knowledge: Don Emiliano Orózco, Don J. Hilario Feliciano, Senor Municipal *Sindico* of this authority; Don Lucas Pérez of 40 years of age, married, without education, farmer, and also the Senores Victoriano López, Juan Apolonio, Elijir, María Dionicio, and María Antonia, all of the same last name, López, all over the age of majority, the first married, the others single, [the men are] labourers and [the women do] female work, of this community, all without education; I give testimony that I know them; following their civil rights, the first person of this municipality, and the seconds as well, having manifested the Sr. *Sindico* of word and in Castellano [Spanish] that is authorized for this by the Act of government of the 23rd of December of 1907, propagated on March 12th of last year, to extend in favour of persons who solicit the land in the form... to confirm their land in their favour are present Sr. Victoriano López and his siblings, who have paid the sum of 75 pesos as the value of the land composed of 150 *cuerdas*[15] that they possess in the *ejido* of this municipality...in Chixal of this jurisdiction we possess the lot of land composed of 150 *cuerdas* that we received by inheritance from our deceased father, Gabriel López, one year ago; the boundaries are: on the east, measures 25 *cuerdas,* 9 *varas* with J. Lorenzo Orozco and José Miranda with a ravine and stream through the middle; on the west, 22 *cuerdas* 10 *varas* along the road to Sipacapa; on the south, 30 *cuerdas* with Manuel Miranda, Santiago Berduo, and Silvestra Ramirez, and a ditch in between. We do not have a land title that guarantees the rights we legally have, for this reason we solicit this based on the governmental Decree of December 23 1907...[many witnesses and information confirming identities, and proof that they possess this land publicly and peacefully], signed by Juan Zacaria, Gregorio Miranda, Hilario Feliciano, Emiliano Orozco, and Antonio Ramirez (Municipal Secretary).[16]

Registering land ownership required individuals to pay for this legalization process, as in the example above in which the family paid 75 pesos. As a result, many families lost all or some of their traditional lands because they could not afford to pay for the registration. Ladino families and better-off Mayan families were able to accumulate larger extensions of land in this process, increasing socio-economic stratification within the community.

4.2.3. Forced Migratory Labour

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[15] A *cuerda* is the unit used for the areal measurement of land in Comitancillo. One *cuerda* is equal to 635 square metres or 0.24 acres. A *vara* is equal to 0.7 of a square metre.

[16] Comitancillo *Registro de Terrenos* 1915, Comitancillo Municipal Archives

Paradoxically, the drive to build a modern capitalist export economy in Guatemala was fueled by the exploitation of forced labour brigades. Beginning in the late nineteenth century, highland communities were required to send labourers to work on coastal coffee plantations and in public construction projects. The people of Comitancillo, like the majority of the highland Maya peoples, continued to be fundamentally simple commodity producers (owning the means of production and producing for household and local consumption) within their geographical communities; but they were forcefully circulated into capitalist commodity production in the coffee export economy as seasonal wage labourers (Freidman 1980). This economic formation has been described as "internal colonization" (Wolpe 1988:28-32). Labour-power physically produced in a non-capitalist economy, such as the simple commodity economy of the Mayan communities, is utilized within the capitalist production sector. This utilization enables the capitalist sector to pay less than the true cost of the reproduction of labour, as the costs are subsidized by the simple commodity economy.

The earliest record book still in the municipal archives of Comitancillo dates from 1879. This book documents the payments that the municipal authorities received for sending labourers to the *fincas* of the Pacific slopes of San Marcos. In 1888 the municipality received 14.00 pesos when it sent *mozos* to work on *fincas*. A municipal accounts book dated 1911 records over 300 *mozos* sent to various *fincas*. In 1914, 500 were sent; and the municipality received a payment of 2565 pesos for the rights of these labourers.[17] In 1918, there is a list of Comitecos on *fincas* with debts to the *finca* owners, mainly on *fincas* on the coastal slopes of San Marcos[18]

By the 1930s work on the *fincas* was no longer directly managed through the municipal office, but rather organized by *contratistas* (contractors). These contractors were mostly Maya, often local Comiteco men, who held an intermediary position between the community and the *finca* owners, were community leaders in their own right, and also by virtue of this work held a position of status and power in the community. There were about a dozen contractors for the approximately 20 coastal *fincas* that recruited labourers in Comitancillo.[19] The contractors for these *fincas* were men such as Apolonio Marroquín, the former mayor; Hilario Feliciano, another former municipal council member; and members of the Marroquín, García, and Coronado families prominent in local politics. Interestingly, there were also several Ladina women who acted as contractors. Juana O. De Léon Chavez and Virginia Reyna de Calderón, both women from the first Ladino families that settled in Comitancillo at the turn of the century, acted as contractors for Platanillo and El Farrol *fincas* respectively.

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[17] Comitancillo Municipal Account Book 1914

[18] AGCA *Jefetura Politico de San Marcos* 1918

[19] *Registro de Jornaleros*, Comitancillo 1930-1944

In addition to forced *finca* labour, the municipality had obligations to provide *mozos* or *jornaleros* (labourers) for public works, particularly during the state's intense road and railway construction of the 1920s and 1930s. For example, Comitancillo was required to send 40 *mozos* per month for the construction of the railway from Quetzaltenango to the coast,[20] and ten *mozos* periodically for the San Marcos coastal road.[21]

It appears that the municipality did have some discretion in the matter, as they occasionally requested permission of the *Jefe Político* to be exempted from labour duties because they were in the midst of planting season (e.g., May 1922, May 1923), and were given a temporary reprieve. There was even a situation in which the municipality begged reprieve from sending *mozos* for public works projects because their inhabitants were highly indebted on the coffee *fincas*, and so were not available for public projects.[22]

By the late 1930s and early 1940s, during the Ubico dictatorship, a very formally documented system of *jornaleros* was put in place to control Mayan labour. The national vagrancy laws required that landless male peasants work 150 days a year on a plantation or a public works project, and peasants with some land were required to work for 100 days a year (Handy 1984:98). The municipal archives of Comitancillo contain the large registration books recording the exact number of days of labour completed by each Comiteco labourer. The books record the date, name, identification number, number of days worked (40-120 days depending on how much land the person was cultivating in Comitancillo), and the *aldea* of residence of the worker. The records indicate that in 1938-39 there were 951 men registered as *jornaleros* in

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[20] Comitancillo Municipal Sessions 1922 1923 1924
[21] Comitancillo Municipal Sessions 1922
[22] Comitancillo Municipal Sessions, August 8 1924

Comitancillo; in 1939-40 there were 1416 men; 1940-41, 1575 men; 1941-42, 1511 men; 1942-43, 1152 men; and in 1943-44 there were 1205.

In addition to work on public constructions outside the municipality, Comitecos were drafted to build bridges and roads within the community. On March 26 1936, the municipal *Intendente*, Laureano Miranda, sent a letter to the *Jefe Politico*, Idigoras, in San Marcos indicating that a local committee had been formed to organize the construction of the Comitancillo-San Lorenzo road, and seeking permission to request contributions of ten centavos of all municipal residents for the purchase of construction tools.[23] The majority of the committee members were from the dominant Ladino families such as Rodas and Reyna; and the remainder were prominent Mam such as the former mayor, Apolonio Marroquín. On June 20 1936, the then *Indentente*, Felipe del Aquila, complained in a letter to the *Jefe Politico* that there was a problem with the "indians" who refused to contribute money and labour for the road construction; and that the "Indians do not want this municipality to progress".[24]

In 1945, as part of its overall program of rural and labour reform, the progressive government of Arévalo established a new 1945 constitution the effectively abolished vagancy laws and all forms of forced labour, and the 1947 Labour Code defined basic worker rights. These actions moved the national economy for the first time into a capitalist mode of production that was not dependent on forced labour. However, by this time, the highland Mayan communities were becoming unsustainable due to increasing population (reaching pre-Conquest levels again) and associated land shortages (Watanabe 1997:241). So ironically, while labour migrations were no longer required, the Maya were obligated by economic conditions to continue to participate in seasonal wage labour migrations.

There is a gap in the Comitancillo records of labour contracts during the 1944-1954 period; however, the increase in *finca* labour migrations after the military-sponsored and United States-supported coup of 1954 is evident in the following years. The registries of *finca* work contracts for the years 1952 to 1959 in the Comitancillo archives contain data on thousands of labourers, including the name of the labourer, the contract number, the number of days of labour contracted, the name of the *finca*, and the contractor. There were between 1000-2000 *finca* contracts recorded each year beginning in 1953. This total peaked in 1961 with 2042 contracts, and then began to decline to 700 in 1965; and vacillated around 600 throughout the 1970s until 1980, when the record was discontinued. While the contracts mention only the name of the adult male labourer involved, it appears that frequently other household members accompanied him to fulfill the contract.

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[23] Comitancillo Municipal Sessions 1936

[24] AGCA *Jefetura Politico de San Marcos* 1936

4.3. Religion: Maya, Catholic, and Protestant

During the colonial period, the Spanish undertook the conversion of the Maya to Christianity. Four dominant religious orders accompanied the Spanish into Guatemala, each taking responsibility for the conversion and religious administration of a distinct region of the colony. The Mercedarians, arriving in 1537, were responsible for western Guatemala (Jones 1994:61). Tejutla, adjacent to Comitancillo on the west, was the primary centre for the Mercedarians in the San Marcos Highlands. The parish of Tejutla consisted of five *pueblos* (Tejutla, Sipacapa, Ixtahuacan, Tutuapa, Tajamulco) and three *haciendas*, one of which was Comitán. Comitancillo may have been described as a *hacienda* (estate or farm) at the time because it did not have a large town centre, but rather a small dispersed population. A document dated 1689 in the colonial records indicates that the Mercedes Order was paid by the colonial regime to provide certain administrative functions for the state during the early colonial period for the southern Mam communities from Ostuncalco to Tajamulco, and including Comitancillo.[25]

The policy of *congregaciones*, in which dispersed populations were forced to resettle in concentrated towns to facilitate conversion to Christianity and create centralized pools of exploitable labour, was imposed in much of the Guatemalan highlands in the mid-sixteenth century (Lovell 1992:76-89). This may have occurred in Tejutla; however, there appears to have been little consolidation of population in the Comitancillo region. Indeed there is little evidence of a permanently inhabited town site in Comitancillo until the nineteenth century.

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[25] AGCA A 3.2 Exp. 19.472 Leg. 1074 Folio 4

The first Catholic Church building was constructed in 1648 on the hill that eventually became the town centre, and a dramatic local legend explains the supernatural identification of this site (Feliciano 1996:34-35). Because Comitancillo was a relatively isolated and sparsely populated region, occasional visiting priests undertook the process of conversion. Parish records document the names and dates of the priests that visited the community for several months each year from 1762 until 1965, when the first resident priest assumed control of the parish (Feliciano 1996:41-43).

The recollections of the elderly women of Comitancillo are indicative of the elaborate syncretistic Maya-Catholic religious practices that developed in the community over the centuries. For example, by the early twentieth century the statues of Catholic saints that filled the Comitancillo church each represented the soul of a particular animal.

> Before [in the 1940s] there were many images on the altar of the Catholic Church, but when the resident priests came the images disappeared...The people said that each image signified something or was the soul-owner of the animals. They said that San Pedro was identified with the horses; San Nicolas was the owner of the chickens, and so on. I did not see this, I just heard if from other people and from my grandparents because they told us [children] to stay at home and take care of the house, while they went to put candles for the sheep, the chickens, and the other animals in front of the saints in the church...They stroked the candles over each one of us before they went to church. They also fasted before they went to church; they had to wait until the candles were finished before they could eat because they had respect for the elders. – Graciela, 61

4.3.1. The *Cofradías:* Celebrating the Saints

In the absence of formal religious clergy, the *cofradías* (brotherhoods charged with the care of the saints), and local leaders were responsible for celebrations and the care of the church. In Comitancillo in the first half of the twentieth century, at least according to the recollections of elderly Comitecos, there were two main *cofradía* groups, one from the *aldea* of Tuichelupe, and the other from the *aldea* of Chicajalaj. Some women also recall another from Tuimuj; however, that one seems to have disappeared earlier in the century. The focus of activities was on the *Fiesta de la Santa Cruz* (April 29 – May 3) because the full name of the municipality is Santa Cruz de Comitancillo, and on the *Fiesta de la Virgen María* (May 29-31) because the Catholic church possesses a special statue of the *Virgen María*. Apparently these celebrations were so large that almost every year between 1908 and 1940, the municipal authorities requested additional security guards from the departmental capital in San Marcos to assist in controlling drunken and disruptive behaviour.[26]

Men were elected on an annual basis to fulfill the positions in the *cofradías.* In Comitancillo in the twentieth century, these positions were not hierarchically nor successively ranked as was the case recorded in other many other Maya communities (e.g. La Farge 1947; Wagley 1949; Oakes 1951; Bunzel 1952; Tedlock 1992). While each male community member was expected to fulfill a *cofradia* position at least once during his life, the community did look for certain characteristics in the men elected:

> It was an obligation to be a member of the *cofradía* [in the 1950s], similar to the selection of *auxiliares* today. The people would elect who was going to be in the position, it doesn't matter what community they come from; you must accept. The people would see who was a leader, and had ideas, and elect that person, or the person who had some resources. – Olívia, 57

While it was the men that were elected, their wives were automatic partners; and were particularly critical to certain activities such as food preparation, and hosting visiting priests.

The predominant memory of the majority of the elderly women of the *cofradía* is the three-day walking trip made to Quetzaltenango to purchase the appropriate candles, fireworks, and other specialized items needed for the celebration; and the ritual mass celebrated in the church in the town centre.

> We[my husband and I] were part of the *cofradía* from our *aldea* for a time [in about 1945] and at that time it was more active than it is today. We went to bring candles, fireworks, incense, bundles of spices, and many other things. We went to Quetzaltenango to bring these things, and it took three days of walking to go and return again.
>
> At the time, the Catholic church did not have a resident priest, but rather one came to visit from outside, so the *cofradía* had to cover all the expenses of the priest when he came to celebrate mass for the fiesta of Santa Cruz and the fiesta of the *Virgen María.* We had to buy all the food for the priest in Quetzaltenango, because in Comitancillo one couldn't get the kind of food that priests eat. In addition we women had to prepare all the food for the people that participated in the religious activities.
>
> So when the priest came to town, it was necessary for two couples to care for him, prepare his food, and to wash and care for his horse, because he came on horseback, because there were no vehicles at that time.
>
> Each member of the *cofradia* had different responsibilities. For example, some couples were responsible to take care of the priest, another group was responsible to make food for all the people, and another group went to Quetzaltenango for the candles.
> –Irma, 75

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[26] Comitancillo Municipal Sessions 1908 – 1940 (e.g. April 13 1908 and April 24 1931)

In addition to the religious activities, the festivals were celebrated with ritual dances, such as "The Dance of the Deer," "The Dance of the Conquerors," and "The Dance of the Monkey." Each of these dances required specialized, elaborate costumes; and tells a story from the history of the Maya. Both women and men danced; however, only men played the musical instruments; the *chirimía* (reed flute), the *tun* (a small hand drum), and the traditional marimba.

When the new *cofradía* was elected at the end of the celebrations, special candles were passed to the new members as symbols of their positions.

> Special candles were transferred to the new *cofradía.* And they said "This candle will remain with you as a symbol of your responsibility to the candles, and you will carry it for the whole year." Nowadays the candles are very small, but then they were so large you could barely put your arms around them. –Olívia, 57

4.3.2. The *Chmanes:* Mayan Priests

Throughout most of the twentieth century, Mayan priests figured prominently in the lives of Comitecos. These men filled a shaman role; and in fact, in Mam they are called *Chman.* They were male part-time religious specialists who were held in high regard in the community; and provided healing and divination services for individuals, as well as performing public community religious acts as necessary. They utilized the traditional Mayan calendar and natural objects, such as *miches* (brightly coloured seeds) and various types of beans, to ascertain the cause of misfortune or illness, and to predict the future. They performed various rituals that involved animal sacrifices, incense, candles, and other elements to rectify individual and family problems; and to ensure good outcomes of pregnancies, marriages, new buildings, and agricultural production. In return, the petitioner paid for the services in-kind, usually with tortillas, eggs, or the body of the animal that was sacrificed. The prevalence of these priests in Comitancillo is evident in the fact that one-third of the sixty women interviewed in this study had a grandfather, father, or husband who was a practitioner.

The *chmanes* also acted occasionally on behalf of the entire community, particularly when crops were at risk because of drought or excessive rain. Olívia recalls an interesting case like this in the early 1950s.

> The *chman* went to pray for rain on the top of a mountain because there was no rain, and it was just summer, and the plants needed water. When they saw that there was no rain, what they did was call all the children, because they have no sin, the adults always have some sin, while the children are mostly still pure. So all the children were called at a certain time and day...to go to the house of the *chman*...with candles. "Good children, prepare yourselves, because tonight we will go pull down the rain from on top of the mountain," he said. Then we all went with candles, walking to the mountain. When we arrived there were many people there, playing marimba, *chirimla*, and it was very happy. The *chman* stood in the middle of the children, and the children were all on their knees around him. The adults were in a circle around the children, and everyone had candles. At midnight they began to pray with incense for rain. At the instant they finished praying, the rain started. Some said it had nothing to do with the *chman*, but how is it possible if as soon as they finished the ceremony, it began to rain? – Olivia, 57

4.4.3. Return to Orthodoxy: Catholicism and Protestantism

In the middle of the twentieth century, conservative influences from Spain, such as Opus Dei and Acción Católica, spread within the Roman Catholic Church in Guatemala; and initiated a process to reestablish a more controlled, orthodox religious practice (Garrard-Burnett 1998:86-87). In Comitancillo this process was largely associated with the arrival of the first priest to reside permanently in the community almost five centuries after the introduction of Christianity. In 1965, the first priest arrived, followed shortly by a second; and then in 1969, Monseñor José Mercedes Carrera Mejía took the position, and has been there ever since, a dominant figure within the community.

As already mentioned, the resident priest removed the many images that filled the church; and community members also recount that he outlawed the practice of Mayan *costumbre* (customs and rituals) by *chmanes*. He also enforced church and civil marriages, proclaiming that Mayan marriage rituals were illegitimate. While previous readers had celebrated the mass in Mam, after the arrival of Monseñor Carrera, all masses were performed in Spanish. A record in the Municipal sessions of 1976 indicates that Acción Católica wanted the municipal land of the old market building to expand the church; however, the municipal authorities rejected this expansion.[27]

The middle of the twentieth century also witnessed the entrance of non-Catholic Christian churches into the community. During the liberal reform of the 1870s, President Justo Rufino

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[27] Comitancillo Municipal Sessions, April 14 1976

Barrios passed a Freedom of Worship decree that eliminated Catholicism as the state religion, and opened the door to the introduction of Protestantism (Garrard-Burnett 1998:11). Echoing the division of Guatemala by the Catholic religious orders in the sixteenth century, the Protestant sects signed an agreement (a comity accord) in the early twentieth century (1902) that divided the country into denominational spheres of influence (Garrad-Burnett 1998:29). In this agreement, San Marcos fell within the territory of the Central America Mission (CAM), a theologically and politically conservative Protestant organization originating in Dallas, Texas.

During the first decades of the century, CAM focused its missionary efforts on its territory closer to Guatemala City; and thus it was not until 1953 that the first North American evangelical missionaries arrived in Comitancillo (Feliciano 1996:45). Despite initial resistance and slow growth, eventually several congregations were formed. In the past two decades, several small Nazarene and Pentecostal churches have also been established in the town centre and in various *aldeas*.

Currently about 20% of the population claims to be Evangelical[28] (Feliciano 1996:46). Several women in the sample interviewed in this study described the conversion of their families to evangelicalism. Most often the husband converted first, and the wife was expected to follow (three cases). In several families, this conversion created serious generational or marital conflict (two cases). For others, the emphasis of the evangelical churches on abstinence from alcohol consumption positively affected the behaviour of the men in the household (three cases).

4.4.4. The Re-emergence of Mayan Spirituality

In the past decade, the Mayan religious customs that were repressed during the 1970s and 1980s by Catholic authorities in Comitancillo have begun to re-emerge, largely as a result of the cultural revitalization movement that has touched local young people with increasing education. While there are no practicing Mayan priests in Comitancillo presently, it is becoming common for priests from other communities (e.g., San Juan Ostuncalco) to be invited to Comitancillo for special celebrations such as inaugurations and graduations (Feliciano 1996:46-47).

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[28] Most Protestant church adherents call themselves "Evangelicals" in Guatemala.

4.4. The Impact of the Civil War (1972-1996) on Comitancillo

For approximately thirty years, the people of Guatemala have suffered in a violent, bloody, and indiscriminate internal war that has particularly targeted the Mayan communities (Carmack 1988; Jonas 1991; Green 1995). The Department of San Marcos was part of the region dominated by one of the main insurgency groups, ORPA (*Organización del Pueblo en Armas* – Organization of People in Arms); and one of their main bases was located on the slopes of the Tajamulco volcano (Smith 1990:11). While the department of San Marcos did not experience the degree and intensity of violence that some of the others did, several municipalities bordering Comitancillo were victims of documented massacres and attacks[29] of various degrees, all perpetrated by the army (Sichar, 2000).

Comitancillo was relatively quiet during the 1980s, although Comitecos have some memories of violence. Many vividly remember when two local teachers were killed in the mid-1980s while traveling on the bus back to Comitancillo from San Pedro, where they had gone to purchase toys for the children for the annual Christmas celebrations. There are also recollections of military and insurgency troops occasionally passing through the municipality, and a week-long skirmish between the two forces on the slope of the mountain in the *aldea* of Agua Tibia. It is well known in the community that several dozen young men from the municipality joined the insurgency movement, particularly from the *aldeas* of Chicajalaj and Las Cruzes; but for the most part, Comitecos attempted to remain non-partisan.

During the violence, no military stations were set up in the municipality; the closest one was outside the town of Tejutla. Local military commissioners acquired additional influence in the *aldeas* as they had the power to send young men to do military service; but some also used their positions to protect as many men as possible from conscription.[30] In addition, PACS, *Patrullas de Autodefensa Civil*, were formed in Comitancillo; and all adult males were required to participate. As late as 1995, Comitecos were still required to do this service.

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[29] Documented massacres include: in Tajamulco, there were 3 in 1981, 1 in 1982, and 6 in 1983; in Tejutla there was one in 1981; in San Pedro Sacatepéquez there were six in 1982; and in San Marcos there was one in 1984 (Sichar, 2000). More than 300 people were killed in these massacres.

There are several possible explanations for Comitancillo's almost complete escape from the direct effects of the violence. The most obvious is that at the time, this isolated community had a much lower degree of involvement in national politics and social activism compared to many of the communities in Chimaltenango and Quiché that bore the brunt of the attacks. Higher levels of organization meant that the communities were more likely to be considered subversive, and therefore to become targets of state repression.

In addition, although ORPA had bases in the region, San Marcos was not a zone of direct conflict like Quiché, Huehuetenango, and some of the coastal departments. Comitancillo was on one of the transportation routes of the insurgency forces; but apparently the municipality did not draw the attention of the military as a community that provided logistical and food support for the insurgents, another of the accusations that could result in military reprisals.

Internal social cohesion and conflict also played a role in the level of violence experienced by communities. In many of the Mayan communities that experienced the worst external political and structural violence, internal community factions and conflict were exacerbated and further escalated by the experience of living in fear and insecurity (Green 1999; Carmack; 1988). On the other hand, in Santiago Chimaltenango, a community that did not experience direct violence, Watanabe (1992:103) reasoned that "a moral economy of community reinforced the social fabric of community frayed by structural transformations and that this sense of belonging was sufficient to ward off the ravages of internal violence," something that did not occur in many highland communities. Thus Comitecos lived with rumours and stories of the violence occurring in other parts of Guatemala, and their lives were occasionally touched directly by violence; but they employed some of the survival strategies of the past five hundred years, such as silence, concealment, and a tightly knit social fabric that excluded outsiders. In this way,

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[30] Information gathered by the author's husband in conversation with a former military commissioner from the period.

Comitecos were able to prevent the internal factionalism that aggravated violence in many highland communities.

The chief damage caused by the armed conflict on the community of Comitancillo was not so much physical as psychological. Even when we arrived to live in Comitancillo in 1992, people did not openly talk about the armed conflict or engage in political debates of any kind. Linda Green describes the way in which people live in a constant "state of fear" in a response to unremitting danger, and as a result the "invisible violence of fear and intimidation" penetrates the collective social memory and individual lives. (Green 1995:105).

In 1985, after more than 30 years of military regimes, a civilian government was elected; and in 1996 a peace accord was signed between the government and the insurgency groups. In the last few years, Guatemala has begun to emerge from the decades of devastating violence and oppression that left tens of thousands dead and hundreds of thousands displaced internally and externally. Yet, despite efforts to improve conditions since the return to official civilian rule in 1986, human rights violations continue to occur daily (MINUGUA 2002).

5. Guatemala and Comitancillo: At the End of the Twentieth Century

5.1. The National Context

Figures of the total Mayan population living in Guatemala today vary considerably, partly because of the diversity of characteristics used to define ethnicity (such as birth family, language, customs, culture, community of origin, and individual self-perception and identification), and partly because ethnic identity is not necessarily static.[31] An approximation of the Mayan population is 50-70% of the total population of Guatemala; that is, approximately seven million people out of a total of close to 12 million (INE 2002).[32] Divided into 21 distinct ethnic and language groups, the majority of the Mayan population inhabits the highland regions of the country.

Export-oriented commercial agriculture currently dominates the economy and the majority of the fertile land in Guatemala. The humid, volcanic slopes of the mountains are occupied by huge coffee estates; the drier, southern coastal plains by extensive sugar and cotton plantations and cattle ranches; and the tropical lowlands in the northeast by banana plantations. It is estimated that 67% to 75% of the fertile agricultural land in Guatemala is in the hands of only 2% of the landowners, while 80% of farmers occupy only 10% of the land. This represents one of the most unequal land-ownership ratios in the world (Jonas 1991:178). In addition to the human rights and security violations that continue to plague the country, economic inequity persists between a small privileged elite and the poor majority. In 2002, approximately 40% of Guatemalans live in poverty, that is they have difficulty meeting basic daily needs, and and additional 16% live in extreme poverty, unable to meet basic subsistence needs (INE 2002).

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[31] See, for example, the discussion of the complexities of determining ethnic identity in the following references: Jonas 1991:103-106; and Fischer & McKenna Brown 1996; Warren 1978,1998.

[32] The total population of Guatemala in 2002 is 11,986,558 (INE 2002).

The extreme disparities of economic class that exist in Guatemala have a well-defined gender dimension, reflecting global patterns of inequity between women and men. Aggregate data from Guatemala indicate that women overall have lower incomes, fewer income-generating opportunities, lower levels of literacy and education, and participate much less in local and national public life than Guatemalan men (Samayoa 1993; INE 2002). For example 52% of Guatemalan women are illiterate, in comparison to only 35% of men (INE 2002). In addition to a full share of the productive work in the rural and urban sectors, women carry almost the entire burden of reproductive/domestic work in the household.

A unique aspect of the Guatemalan situation is the ethnic dimension of the social structure that permeates all other economic, social, and political stratifications. Economic and social indicators demonstrate that the indigenous population is overwhelmingly within the poorest and the most marginalized sectors of society. More than half (56%) of the population classified as living in poverty is indigenous (INE 2002). Life expectancy among indigenous people is 16 years lower that the non-indigenous population, indigenous illiteracy is 60% compared to 40% in the non-indigenous population, and infant mortality in the highland Maya communities is twice the national average (Jonas 1991:179; INE 2002).

5.2. A Profile of Comitancillo in the 1990s

Today, the Municipality is divided into 47 *aldeas* (see Map 4) with a total population of 51,351 in 2002.[33] The town centre, also called Comitancillo, has a population of approximately 1,000 residents; and is the site of the majority of the local services, businesses, government offices, and the twice-weekly regional market. The population of Comitancillo remains 99% indigenous Maya-Mam. Mam is the mother tongue of the community, and only approximately 50% of the residents speak Spanish as a second language (Feliciano 1996:68).

Local political authority continues to be held by the elected *alcalde* (mayor) and Council members. The *alcalde* and the council members are all Mam men; however, they are associated with the national political parties. They control the funds provided by the national treasurer for operating services and implementing infrastructure projects in the Municipality. These are high-status and enviable positions, not the least because there are many opportunities for personal gain.

The economy of Comitancillo remains essentially small landowner, subsistence agriculture complemented by a small amount of commercial trading and artisan production, and seasonal labour migrations. Economic class in Comitancillo can be divided into three levels; however, these divisions do not correspond to the economic classes in national society; therefore rather than using the vocabulary of economic classes, the term "economic strata" will be used here (Solares 1989).

The "upper economic strata" consists of those who own means of production that produce for the national market, own small businesses, or who work as professionals in the national socio-economic structure. Thus, this group includes the handful of Ladino professionals (teachers, government officials, nurses) who live and work in town during the week, but return to their homes in San Marcos on the weekends. The few Ladino families that have lived in Comitancillo for several generations either operate businesses (a bus transport service, a pharmacy, a pension) or own sizable extensions of land, which they do not cultivate but lease out to Mam farmers. There are also a few poor Ladinos in town who are wage labourers, and tend to identify and associate more with the Maya than with the well-to-do Ladinos.

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[33] Data from Municipal offices of Comitancillo and INE 2002.

The "middle economic strata," about 25% of the *Comiteco* population, corresponds to those residents who own and cultivate land, but also have additional sources of steady income from artisan activities or small-scale commercial trading. These people are essentially petty commodity producers, and live scattered throughout the municipality; however, the majority are concentrated in town and in the immediately adjacent *aldeas.* The elected community officials and authorities mainly come from this group.

The majority of Comitecos, (70%), fall within the "lower economic strata"; they rely on a combination of subsistence agriculture and periodic participation in the wage labour market through seasonal or long-term migration out of the community. These are subsistence farming families that do not produce enough on their small plots of land to sustain the family for the entire year. Over half of the households own less than ten *cuerdas*[34] of land, often of variable quality, when a minimum of ten *cuerdas* of productive agricultural land is required to sustain the average family of eight members (Feliciano 1996:89). These families rely on annual migrations to the coastal plantations to obtain about one-half of their yearly needs through agricultural wage labour, a pattern common throughout the highlands. More recently, there are also labour migration flows of young women to the cities to work as domestics, and young men to the United States as illegal migrant labourers.

In addition to internal subsistence pressures, external social and economic influences have become more pronounced in Comitancillo the last few years, particularly with the extension of national infrastructure into the community, including electricity to almost all the rural communities (1992-1998), a new paved road (1999), and more schools (46 elementary schools, four junior high schools, and two high schools in 2000).

The impact of the economic as well and social changes that have occurred in Comitancillo over the past century will be explored from women's perspectives in the following chapters as we listen to the voices of three generations of Comiteca women.

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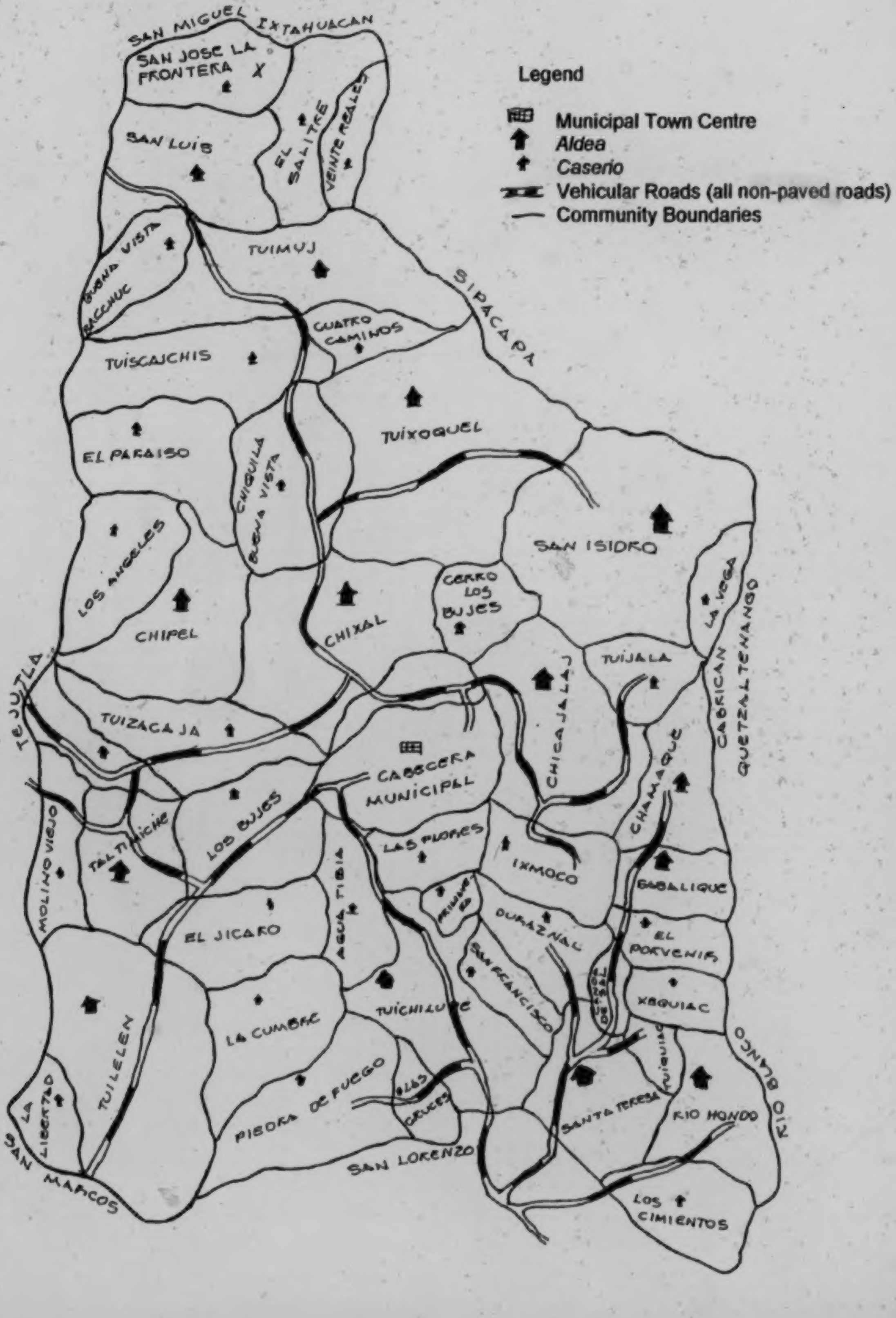
[34] One cuerda is equal to an extension of 25 X 25 metres.

Map 5: Comitancillo 1999: Subdivisions, Settlement and Roads
(Reproduced with permission from Feliciano 1996:9)


Legend
Municipal Town Centre
Aldea
Caserio
Vehicular Roads (all non-paved roads)
Community Boundaries
SAN MIGUEL IXTAHUACAN
SAN JOSE LA FRONTERA
SAN LUIS
EL SALITRE
VEINTE REALES
BUENA VISTA BACCHUC
TUIMUJ
SIPACAPA
CUATRO CAMINOS
TUISCAJCHIS
TUIXOQUEL
EL PARAISO
CHIQUILA BUENA VISTA
SAN ISIDRO
LOS ANGELES
CHIPEL
CHIXAL
CERRO LOS BUJES
LA VEGA
TUIJALA
CHICAJALAJ
CABRICAN
QUETZALTENANGO
TEJUTLA
TUIZACAJA
CABECERA MUNICIPAL
MOLINO VIEJO
TALTIMICHE
LOS BUJES
LAS FLORES
IXMOCO
CHAMAQUE
SABALIQUE
PRIMAVERA
DURAZNAL
EL PORVENIR
AGUA TIBIA
EL JICARO
SAN FRANCISCO
CANOA DE SAL
XEQUIAC
TUILELEN
LA CUMBRE
TUICHILUPE
RIO BLANCO
LA LIBERTAD
PIEDRA DE FUEGO
LAS CRUCES
SANTA TERESA
TUIGUIAC
RIO HONDO
SAN MARCOS
SAN LORENZO
LOS CIMIENTOS

Chapter Four
Elderly Women: A Predetermined Life Path

Josefa's Story

Josefa was born in 1925 in an *aldea* across the valley from the main town. She was one of eight children (five of whom died as infants) born into a peasant family with a very small piece of land (1.5 *cuerdas*[1]). They lived in an adobe house with a thatched roof, and slept with blankets and sacks on the floor. Because of lack of land, and poor production on their *milpa* plot, food was scarce; so that often they had just one *tortilla* for each meal. Her father hired himself out as a day labourer for other better-off farmers in order to earn some cash or the right to cultivate an extra plot of land.

Josefa spent her childhood working in the subsistence tasks of the household. One of her main tasks was herding sheep for five or six hours per day. She also helped her mother bring water from the local spring everyday for household use, and prepare the meals for the family. Her mother was a potter, making clay pots and *comales* from local clay; so Josefa helped her mother grind the clay and make and dry the pots. Starting at age eight, she traveled to the *finca* with her father to harvest coffee several months a year, walking the three days across the mountains to the plantation.

When she was 14 years old (1939), a young man whom she had never met before arrived at her house to ask her parents' permission to speak with her. After several months of visits, she agreed to marry him. After a customary ceremony of prayers, rituals, and receiving advice from the elders, she went with her new husband to live in the household of his parents.

Her parents-in-law were better off than her own parents, so there was never a shortage of food in her new household. However, she recalls that her parents-in-law demanded a constant and arduous amount of work; and they became angry when she did not become pregnant for three years. She tried hard to please them, and even learned how to weave *fajas* (belts) in order to earn some extra money for the household. She says that her husband also treated her well, and never physically or verbally abused her; he just urged her to obey his parents quickly so as not to cause problems.

As her husband was the only son in the family, they inherited the house of his parents, as well as a large portion of the land. Josefa had 21 pregnancies, of which eleven babies survived. In addition to farming, her husband began to trade goods at the local market and sell products on the coast. During the first decades of her marriage, Josefa worked very hard. A baby was constantly on her back or in her womb as she hauled water; collected firewood; husked, cooked, ground, and baked the maize; prepared and cleaned up after meals; washed clothing in the river; and tended the animals.

When her children grew older, and she gained some independence from the daily chores of the household, she also established a small stall at the local market to sell tropical fruit that her husband brought from the coast.

Her husband drank alcohol heavily during the first decade of their married life; and that caused many problems for her, the children, and their household needs. Eventually he stopped drinking; and focused on developing a trading business. Later her husband and his parents converted from Catholicism to Protestantism, and then her parents-in-law insisted that she convert as well.

Josefa and her husband felt that education was very important for their children, even though they also trained them to cultivate the fields, and initiated them in market trading. Today, all of their children have finished high school, and several have university degrees. Several of her children work as teachers, one is a vendor, and all cultivate the land. She has 35 grandchildren and several great grandchildren.

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[1] A *cuerda* is the unit used for the areal measurement of land in Comitancillo. One *cuerda* is equal to 635 square metres or 0.24 acres

Sadly, her husband died this year, at age 90. She continues to live in their home with her two unmarried adult children, one of whom works as a teacher, and the other participates in a sewing cooperative.

"There have been many changes in the lives of women, because the women living today do not suffer like we did in those times. In my case, I am now very happy because now there is potable water, electricity, a corn-grinding mill, and other things that we didn't have before. For this reason, now women do not suffer difficulties/pains like we did in those times...[On the other hand, now] there are some men who treat their wives badly, for example, men who drink alcohol and beat their wives a lot...or look for another woman...When I grew up there wasn't this problem...[because] young people didn't even talk to each other in different places like you see now, the young men are talking with the young women, so people have lost much of what is respect."

-Josefa, 75

Josefa's story illustrates the basic life path of Comiteca women born in the first half of the twentieth century. There are obviously differing details and nuances depending on personalities, family circumstances and resources, and geographic location, however, the life path of Comiteca women born in the first half of the century followed a single predominant pattern. Women's lives followed a single prescribed course. As girls, they provided essential labour within the rural subsistence household, particularly herding sheep, caring for younger siblings, and grinding maize. They received no formal education; and were isolated physically, culturally, and linguistically from the world outside their immediate communities. After marriage at about age 15, women fulfilled the roles of daughters-in-law and wives in the patrilocal home. They not only contributed to subsistence agriculture production and were responsible for all the domestic functions of the household, but they were also the key to the reproduction and maintenance of the family and community. Their labour, activities, and movements were controlled by their parents-in-law and husband during these reproductive years. With time, the couple and their children might establish a separate household; however, a woman's activities were still shaped by her responsibilities as a wife and mother. Eventually, when they reached post-menopause, much of their workload would be transferred to the younger women in the household, particularly daughters-in-law. The elderly women were in a position of authority within the domestic realm of the household; and as they aged, they received the care and respect of their adult children and grandchildren, and some degree of independence in their activities. Thus, the lives of Comiteca women born in the first half of the century largely revolved around the tightly integrated complex of activities that formed the basis of economic subsistence and household reproduction in an isolated, inward-focused Mayan community.

This chapter examines the recollections of 19 Comiteca women, currently between the ages of 50 and 90 years (Table 2). These narratives provide the basis for a reconstruction of predetermined life paths of Comiteca women born in the first half of the twentieth century, and exploration of economic and non-economic determinants in their lives, as well as analysis of gendered positions and power relationships within the household. The lives of these women provide the baseline against which the following two generations of women can be compared. The interview material is supplemented with historical information from national and municipal archives, as well as other secondary data sources.

Table 2: Participant Profile – Elderly Women (50-90 years)

	Name	Age	Year Of Birth	Age at Marriage	Present Marital Status	Number Of Children*	Productive Work other than agricultural
1	María	90	1910	16	Widowed	15/5	Midwife
2	Monica	76	1924	16	Married	4/1	Weaver**
3	Josefa	75	1925	15	Married	21/7	Fruit vendor
4	Irma	75	1925	17	Married	13/2	
5	Malena	73	1927	18	Widowed	10/3	Weaver
6	Natalia	66	1934	13	Widowed	8/2	Footloom Weaver
7	María Fernanda	65	1935	14	Married	9/4	Weaver
8	Paula	65	1935	16	Married	8/5	Potter
9	Jacinta	62	1938	14	Married	12/2	Weaver
10	Graciela	61	1939	14	Married	11/3	
11	Gabriela	60	1940	17	Married	8/1	Weaver
12	Inez	60	1940	15	Widowed	11/3	Weaver
13	María Eugenia	60	1940	16	Married	13/3	Weaver
14	Manuela	58	1942	17	Widowed	11/3	Weaver
15	Pilar	57	1943	15	Married	14/3	
16	Olivia	57	1943	20	Married	12/4	
17	Joaquina	56	1944	15	Married twice	11/5	Weaver
18	Herminia	55	1945	16	Married	7/1	
19	Guadelupe	52	1948	18	Married	11/3	
Average		64	1936	15.89		11/3	

*Number of births/number of infant deaths

**Backstrap Weaver unless otherwise indicated

1. Land, Inheritance, and Residence: Traditional Patterns and Privatization

Inheritance, marital residence, and gendered labour within the household are tightly interrelated elements in community and household systems. When one element changes, this triggers changes and accommodations in other elements. The basic inheritance and marital residence patterns in Comitancillo during the first half of the century were (and still are) patrilocal, in that after a marriage agreement[2], a young woman goes to live with her husband in the home of his parents. Usually the young couple and their children live in the paternal household for several years. Among the older women interviewed, the time living with their husband's family ranged from three to 15 years. Ideally, the couple eventually moves into their own home. In some cases, the woman's husband received his paternal land inheritance; and they built their own house there. Other couples save money from yearly migrations to the coffee plantations, and eventually purchase their own land for a house. So while patrilocal residence was an obligation, women could shorten the length of residence through negotiation with their husbands and fathers-in-law and by accumulating the resources needed to establish an independent household. Several of the women (Pilar, Jacinta, María) in this sample worked arduously on the *fincas* in order to accumulate the means to build their own homes.

Coupled with initial patrilocal residency and eventual household independence is the custom that the family house is left to the youngest son, who is the last to marry, and stays in the house, caring for the aging parents (Hawkins 1984). Malena explained the reasons for this particular system.

> The father of the family says that it is not possible for a woman to remain as the owner [inherit] the family home, because the woman will marry, and will go live in the home of the man [her husband]. On the other hand, the son will stay in the house and care for his parents, so I think it is preferable that the man [inherits] the house because he will live in the house; look, how my son is taking care of me now. –Malena, 73

For example, in this sample, both Olivia and Josefa married youngest sons, and inherited and live in the houses of their deceased parents-in-law.

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[2] State civil and church marriages did not become the norm in the community until within the last three decades; until then a traditional Mam ritual signaled the beginning of a couple relationship, as is discussed later in this chapter.

In Comitancillo both male and female children receive an inheritance; however, the male offspring often receive more than the female. Monica relates the explanation that her parents gave her for this practice:

> I received only four *cuerdas* [of land] as my inheritance. The truth is that my four brothers received a much bigger amount than we as sisters did. My deceased parents told me that we women were not worth as much as the men and for that reason we would not receive as much inheritance. On the other hand, the men were going to care for them when they could no longer work, [my parents] said. Also, my parents said that as women when we marry we go to live in the house of the man, and will of course be his servant; in other words under his command, and therefore the woman cannot make her own decisions. - Monica, 76

Inherited land was one "pocket of authority" that these women possessed; although the degree of control women had over the land they inherited varied considerably. For example, Manuela was married to a very abusive and alcoholic husband, who would not even let her visit a male doctor because of jealousy and suspicion; however, she owned and controlled her inheritance.

> I have my own land that my father left me as an inheritance. Well, I sold the land he left me in [the *aldea* where I was born], and bought a few *cuerdas* here in [the *aldea* where I married]. Now I have passed that land to my children. - Manuela, 58

A woman who brings no land inheritance into a marriage is in a vulnerable position, according to the women interviewed.

> No, [I had no inheritance] because my parents were poor and they had no land. I cannot give any inheritance to my children because I have no land. I am living with the man [my husband] as if I were his servant, because I have no goods and any other thing, I am with him because of my sons. I say that it is difficult [for a woman who marries with no inheritance] because there are men who are not conscientious with their women if they know she has no inheritance or doesn't have a craft-making skill. But in my case, my husband didn't say anything to me about the fact that I have no inheritance because he knows very well that I am only here to care for my children, wash their clothes, and make their food. Also, I help my children with the costs of their studies, even though I don't know an art, because when we were recently married we worked on the *finca*s [and I earned money there]. - María Eugenia, 60

A woman with no land or an income-generating skill is at a disadvantage in relation to her husband. The ability to produce food or goods for consumption or sale is directly related to value and position within the household. The daily reproductive labour of feeding, clothing, and caring for the household members does not have the same value. María Eugenia's comment also suggest that a woman's sense of belonging within the household and commitment to her husband are linked to the ability to produce subsistence goods for the household. She feels that the only ties to the household she has lived in for 44 years are the responsibilities and commitments she has to her children and their futures. It is noteworthy that she does not feel that she owns or has a claim on any of the resources or products of the farm and household unit, despite her 44 years of work in it. On the other hand, it is interesting to note that María Eugenia was the only woman that mentioned "love" in connection with marriage. She is the only woman from outside Comitancillo who married a Comiteco; and when asked why she came here, her answer was "because of the love of the man" (María Eugenia, 60).

There were only two exceptions (2/18) to the patrilocal residency rule among the older informants. One was María, the oldest informant, at 90 years of age, whose story is told in chapter 1. While working on the *finca* as a young woman, she met her future husband, a young man from another *aldea* in Comitancillo. When she and her husband and five children returned to Comitancillo, they had difficulty obtaining land. Her husband came from a very poor family with no possibility of providing the young couple with a plot of land. However, María's grandfather sold them a piece of land. María explains that there were problems with the inheritance of her grandfather's land because he was married three times successively, and all his children from various wives disputed the land, and therefore they had to purchase a piece of land from him.

Guadelupe, one of the younger women in this group, also did not follow the patrilocal pattern of post-marriage residency. She was born in 1948 and married in 1966, at age 18 years, slightly older than the average age of marriage at the time. Her father had separated with her biological mother when she was a child, but she stayed with her father. He had extensive land holdings in the Tuimuj region, a higher altitude community, with less agriculturally fertile land; and he owned a large sheep herd that Guadelupe tended. Her father remarried twice. The second wife died of illness but the third lived to produce several more children for him. However, when young Guadelupe met and agreed to marry a young man from the neighbouring community, it was decided that he would come to live in Guadelupe's father's house because the household was small, and he agreed to assist her father with the agricultural work.

> He wanted to live in the house of my father, and of course he helps my father with the work...My father still lives in his house [34 years later], and we live in our own house. [My father] gave me my inheritance, and that's where we built our house. He gave me 25 *cuerdas*...[My husband's] mother gave him only eight *cuerdas*, because he was a

> orphan from youth [his father died], and so his mother divided up the land. She did not want him to come to live in our house [when we just got married], for although she has many children, they are all female, and he is the only man in the family. For this reason he always goes to work his mother's land for her, and do other work for her. – Guadelupe, 52

These two exceptions to the pattern suggest that the patrilocal practice of post-marriage residency is only disregarded in this agricultural community under unusual circumstances, primarily when the husband's family has significantly fewer land resources than the wife's family.

2. Women in Subsistence Agriculture Production

2.1. *Milpa:* Essential Foodstuffs and Cultural Base

Milpa, the cultivation of the historic Mayan triad of maize, beans, and squash, is the subsistence base of the community. The traditional Maya gender division of labour basically assigns responsibility for *milpa* cultivation to men, and the care and herding of animals to women and children; however, as the following description illustrates, women provided additional labour at critical points in the cycle (Table 3). Although not described here, the cultivation cycle was traditionally accompanied by prayers, rituals, and special foods at particular points in the process. Some of the women interviewed remembered observing these traditional practices when they were young girls; however, they are rarely practiced today.

Comitecos practiced "associated planting" in which three or four different types of seeds are planted together in a small mound of earth approximately one metre apart. Seed combinations include maize, several types of beans or peas, and some type of squash. Associated planting has numerous environmental and productive advantages including a minimum level of security in that there is always some harvest .[3]

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[3] The diverse depths of the plant roots allows the plants to take advantage of the distinct nutrients available in different zones of the soil, the varying depth of the roots also allows absorption of water from various depths, dense plant cover provides less opportunity for weeds to grow, and the plants are better able to survive drought or dry periods because they retain more humidity. Plants are less susceptible to disease and plagues because there is no continuous contact between similar plants. Plants complement each other in terms of the minerals they absorb from and discharge into the soil; for example, beans tend to deposit nitrogen in the soil, while corn absorbs nitrogen.

Table 3: The Maize Cultivation Cycle in Comitancillo

Season	Month	Dry-Season Planting	Rainy Season Planting
Dry	**February**	Prepare soil – men & boys Planting - All family members	
Dry	**March**	Prepare soil – men & boys Planting- All family members	
Dry	**April**		Prepare Soil – men & boys Planting - All family members
Rainy	**May**	Apply fertilizer – men & boys	Prepare Soil – men & boys Planting - All family members
Rainy	**June**	Begin weeding – all family members First Leaves Cut	
Rainy	**July**	Weeding – all family members Second Set of Leaves Cut	Apply fertilizer – men & boys First Leaves Cut – women
Rainy	**August**	Weeding – all family members Folding the Corn Stalks	Weeding – all family members Second Set of Leaves Cut - women
Rainy	**September**	Weeding – all family members First Cobs (Fresh Corn) Ready	Weeding – all family members Folding the Corn Stalks – All family members
Rainy	**October**	Harvest - All family members	First Cobs (Fresh Corn) Ready
Dry	**November**	Harvest - All family members	
Dry	**December**		Harvest - All family members
Dry	**January**		Harvest – All family members

There are two planting times: the dry-season planting in February-March, and the rainy season planting in April-May. The dry season in the Guatemalan highlands is from October to April, and the rainy period is from May to September. The men and boys of the family prepare the fields using large-bladed hoes. Usually, any remnants of last year's crop such as corn stalks are worked into the soil to provide more organic material. The actual planting involves all family members. Usually several males go first, forming small mounds of earth, then a man drops in several maize seeds; then the women and children follow planting the black beans and squash, and covering the seeds.

Men and boys apply organic compost to the field approximately four months after seeding: in May for the dry-season planting and in July for the rainy-season planting. Throughout the growing season, the chickens and turkeys are allowed to run through the *milpa,* eating insects and scratching out the eggs of pests laid around the base of the corn plants. This is obviously an effective means of pest control; and, remarkably, the poultry do not eat the growing vegetables.

Four months after planting, the women cut the first leaves for use in tamales, as this task is directly linked to the female responsibility for feeding the family. During May through July the entire family weeds the field to ensure space for the young plants to grow. When the crop is seven or eight months old and the cobs almost fully developed, the stalks are folded over at about four or five feet above the ground. The purpose of this practice is to initiate the drying of the cobs on the stalk. The stalks are folded at the end of August for dry-season planting, and the end of September for the rainy season planting.

The first cobs are cut in September or October. These are sweet corn cobs, in contrast to the dried kernels harvested and stored at the end of the season. All members of the household are involved in harvesting, and previously the extended family worked together in the harvest.

Some harvesters pick the corncobs, others beans, and still others any squash remaining in the field (these have been picked throughout the growing season as they mature and as they are needed). The cobs are hung to dry in the rafters of the house, or laid out in the patio or on the roof in the sun. When they are completely dried, the whole family works at husking and shelling the corn, and storing granulated maize in sacks and hanging whole cobs on the rafters in the house.

During the first part of the century there were no commercial crops; and family gardens, also a female responsibility, were small plots largely dedicated to the production of herbal medicines.

2.2. Animal Husbandry: A Female Responsibility and Resource

While men's responsibility for crop production involves a series of brief intense labour inputs at planting, cleaning, and harvesting, women's work of animal raising, on the other hand, requires constant, daily inputs of labour. Depending on the animal, this task includes grinding grain for feed, gathering fodder, cleaning pens, and pasturing. Thus the large number of animals produced in Comitancillo during the first half of the century was largely the result of women's substantial labour allocations to animal husbandry.

The municipality used to have extensive pastures because there was a low population density during the first decades of the twentieth century, and the amount of land occupied by field crops was considerably less than today. Large sheep herds were largely located in the outlying *aldeas* that had more pastureland available, and were at a higher altitude and thus were less suitable for crop cultivation (San Sebastian, Tuilelen, El Durzanal, Sabilique, Taltimiche, La Gruta, Tuichelupe, San José Frontera). The families that did not raise large sheep herds lived in the more populated central communities that also possessed better agricultural land (Chicajalaj, Los Bujes, Aqua Tibia, Tuizacaja).

The daily work of pasturing sheep was largely the work of girls from the ages of about 6 to 15 years, at which age they usually married. About half (10/19) of the women in this sample spent large amounts of time as girls herding sheep; some of them did it eight hours a day, every day of the year, without a break.

> When I was a young girl (6 to 15 years old - 1915-25), I was never taken anywhere, they didn't even let me go to school, rather I just spent my time pasturing sheep in the pastures...With another girl we always took about 100 sheep to graze...I left after breakfast and I returned home at suppertime...When I went out to take the sheep to graze I always had to grind maize for the pigs to eat before I left, and when I returned...My smaller sister would bring us our lunch in the pastures. -María, 90

> When I was a child, I just herded sheep (1948-53), because before in this place there were few houses, because there were only pastures and trees like pine and cypress, and straw. I went to graze the sheep above the house of Mr. Salvador, and also along the side of the path because in this time there was a lot of space to graze; it was very nice because the people did not complain about anything when I grazed [the animals] in that place. In those times we did not plant *milpa* because you couldn't harvest much; there were only trees at this time. Later, the people bought land little by little, and in that way divided the land to each family, so that now there is nowhere to graze animals. -Jacinta, 62

The task of herding sheep is unique from other agricultural activities within the household. At a very young age, girls were left alone for long periods of the day, and were responsible for the most valuable component of the household economy, the animal herds. Unlike the boys, who worked daily alongside their fathers and the other older men in the household, younger girls would go out alone or with older girls, likely in the mid-teens, to herd sheep in remote pastures. They would spend the days alone, or with one other girl; and take full responsibility for their father's, grandfather's, or uncle's animals. When herding sheep they did not have the direct supervision that characterized their work in the kitchen, grinding maize in the morning and in the evening. In comparison to their lives after marriage, when they were under the direct and constant supervision of their mothers-in-law, this was a period of life in which they had relative freedom from perpetual observation, and at the same time had heavy responsibilities in terms of the household resources. Some girls carried embroidery or weaving with them to do while watching the sheep graze. The work should not be overly romanticized, however, as the seasonal climatic cycle was often harsh, with daily rains and ubiquitous mud during the rainy season; and frost in the mornings and heat at mid-day during the dry seasons. Despite the frequent harshness of the environment and the strenuousness of the work, it is apparent that girls shouldered a large responsibility and experienced a certain amount of individual freedom during the years they spent as sheepherders. Many commented on meeting friends and young men during their travels to the pastures.

Women were also responsible for the maintenance of poultry and pigs, the livestock housed in and around the household compound. Adult women in their reproductive years were more closely tied to the house as they cared for young children and prepared the family meals, and therefore they also took responsibility for the animals close to home. Grinding maize to feed the pigs and poultry was a task shared with the other females in the household.

> Every time when I went out to pasture the sheep [as a girl], I got up early to grind the corncobs for the food for the pigs. We, the granddaughters, always had to grind the food for the pigs. The daughters-in-law had to dedicate themselves to the preparation of the food for the family. - María, 90

In the more distant, cooler, and higher altitude communities where the land was less suitable for cultivation, there were even more animals than in the lower, more fertile and densely populated communities immediately surrounding the town centre. Thus, Guadelupe talks about the intensity of animal husbandry work shouldered by young girls.

> When I was a young girl, I just pastured sheep, collected grass for the mules, cows, and the chicken coop. After lunch, we would change the straw in the chicken coop. In the evening we would go to the coop again with the cows, mules, and sheep...before we had many animals. My father had cows when I was young. For about 15 years I was pasturing animals. - Guadelupe, 52

Whereas girls and women were responsible for the daily maintenance of the animals, control of the purchase and sale of animals was largely in the hands of the male household head; however, in some cases, women had rights over the chickens and turkeys. For some women, these smaller animals were a kind of savings account: when they needed cash for something urgent or important, they could sell an animal. For many women this was the only access to cash they ever had, and this constitutes one of the pockets of power for women in traditional Mayan households.

2.3. Food Scarcity within the Subsistence Economy

Despite larger land holdings and a much smaller population base than today, fulfilling daily survival needs appears to have been difficult for the majority of Comitecos in the early twentieth century. Many elderly women (14 out of 19) tell of the hunger that they experienced as children:

> In truth, when I was little [1920s & 1930s], I remember well that we did not have much food. My deceased mother divided up the tortillas between us children, and we only ate two times a day. For example, we had breakfast at 10 am and for lunch we ate at 5 pm in the afternoon. I suffered much with my deceased parents because in truth, I grew up very poor. We didn't even have clothes in those days like we do now. - Malena, 73

> The truth is that we did not have enough food in this time [1930s-1940s] when I was young, there was some but it was a mixture of *olote* (ground corn cobs) with *doblador* (bran), and very scarce. So I suffered from a lot of hunger. It's not like now that one can more or less get food. – Paula, 65

> I remember well that our food was very scarce [1940s-1950s]. My deceased mother struggled to get food for us, and she always prepared *olote* mixed with some bran for the family to eat. She wrapped these like tamales for the family to eat. – Pilar, 57

Informants thought the food scarcity had several causes. They thought the cultivation methods were not very good, and that contemporary chemical fertilizers worked better. Families that were able to produce a sufficient basis of subsistence used older traditional methods of rotating cultivation, leaving fields fallow for several years between plantings. Also the weather then as now was unpredictable, and even slight declines in production may have upset the precarious balance of subsistence. There also appears to have been some diseases in the crops; many of the women commented on the shriveled and discoloured crops that they recalled from childhood. An additional factor that contributed to poor agricultural production in the first half of the century was the extended periods of time that farmers were required to leave their communities to fulfill forced labour obligations on public works projects and on the coastal *fincas*.

3. Domestic Work: Meeting Daily Family Needs

Comiteca women, like women throughout the world, are primarily responsible for their family's nourishment, clothing, and general well being. Domestic work is a completely female responsibility, and from an early age girls begin to learn the necessary skills. Domestic tasks occupied about 75% of adult women's time, including cooking, washing, carrying water, gathering firewood, preparing clothing, cleaning the house compound; and caring for children, the sick, and the elderly.

A sample daily schedule for women at various stages in life is outlined in Table Four. Clearly noticeable is the integration of daily domestic duties with agricultural and craft production in their demanding routines. It should be noted that integrated into this work schedule is the constant care of younger children. Women frequently have a baby in a sling on their back throughout the day, and stop to breastfeed on demand. In addition, all the younger children are within close range of their mother at all times, although sometimes in the care of an older sibling.

Of all the domestic tasks, the most onerous was the preparation of maize for household meals; the work required considerable labour, time, skills, and advance preparation to transform maize into the tortillas and tamales that made up the bulk of their diet. After harvest, the corncobs were dried and stored, usually in the rafters of the house. When required, the women, with assistance from the children, shelled the cobs. The dried maize was cooked with lime (*cal*) the day before it was used. The lime softened and loosened the shells of the kernels (it also provided calcium in the daily diet). The back-straining work of grinding soaked corn (*nixtamal*) on a grindstone (*metate*) to produce wet flour "dough" (*maza*) suitable for making tortillas or tamales took two or more hours per day depending on the size of the family. Tortillas are patted out flat

Table 4: Women's Daily Routines

Time	Girl	Middle-aged Woman	Elderly Woman
5:00 – 7:00 am	Help with grinding corn Bring water	Grind maize Prepare breakfast Sweep house compound	Help with food preparation
7:00 – 8:00	Breakfast	Breakfast & cleanup	Breakfast
8:00 – 10:00	Herd sheep	Feed and care for Animals	Collect firewood, folder for animals, etc.
10:00-12:00	Herding	Washing clothes and carrying water	Weaving, pottery, etc.
12:00 – 2:00pm	Herding	Preparing, serving and cleaning up of lunch	
2:00 – 5:00pm	Herding	Weaving	Weaving, pottery etc.
5:00 – 7:00	Return home, help with animals	Grind maize, cook maize for the next day, feeding animals	De-graining corn, help with preparing food
7:00 – 9:00pm	Help in kitchen	Prepare, serve and clean up - supper	Prepare chuj
9:00 – 10:00		Preparation for bed	

breads that are cooked on a flat grill (*comal*), and tamales are fist-sized oblong balls of *maza* wrapped in corn leaves and steam-cooked in a large pot.

> In truth, I do not rest much because I have a lot of work, both in the kitchen and in the fields, especially taking care of the animals. I get up at four in the morning to do my work in the kitchen. For example, making the food: grinding maize three times a day because there is no [motorized] mill in the community. One has to get up at four or five in the morning to wash the cooked maize [*nixtamal*], both for the family food and for the animals. There are times when it also has to be done for the supper as well. Now for the lunch we do it in the morning. My daughters help me. The best way to do it is to have two grinding stones. One woman grinds the almost whole *nixtamal*, then another one continues to grind it finer. We grind from about five to seven in the morning, or about three hours.
>
> About two women grinding three hours can make the food for nine people. After that one has to go to the river to wash, and to bring water because there is no water system... - Olívia, 57

Provision of water for domestic and hygienic needs was also one of the burdensome responsibilities of women. The first potable water systems outside of the town centre were not installed until the 1980s; thus until that time women had to collect water in streams, rivers, and springs to be carried to their homes. Manuela describes some of the hardships involved:

> Another thing that was very difficult in my life is that before there was no potable water service in my community, so [for a period of time] we had to go to get water at two o'clock in the morning, carrying lighted torches on our path to the ravine where there was some water. We always took five or more clay jugs and when we returned, each one carried two jugs on our backs and two in our hands. Everyone went to get water at this time of night; if someone didn't wake up to get water, then they would be left without any because there was not enough water for everyone...so I suffered a lot as a child. It was easier to get water during the winter [rainy season], but during summer [the dry season] there was very little water at the house. – Manuela, 58

Washing clothes is another physically heavy task that involved a trip to a river or stream, scrubbing for several hours in a bent kneeling position, and then carrying the wet laundry back home. As rivers and streams were usually at the bottoms of valleys, the process usually involved a steep climb with a heavy load of laundry and small children.

> I would go to wash in the river and only had black soap made with ashes, and I had to carry the clothes; like I said, it is not like now when there is enough soap. Also there were no plastic sacks, but rather only the other kind [jute sacks] and we carried the clothes in those. - Josefa, 75

4. Craft Production

4.1. Pottery: Specialized Skill and Status

As Reina and Hill (1978) point out, pottery is one of the most enduring cultural elements in Guatemala, from Pre-Maya civilizations to the present highland Maya communities. Utensils are produced from local raw materials, labour and skills, completely independent of outside inputs, and meet a basic need within the subsistence of the household that could not be met otherwise. Like woven textiles, the individuality and identity of the artisan and her community are identifiable in the unique forms and designs of the pottery.

Comitancillo has always been the most significant pottery-producing region in the San Marcos Highlands (McBryde 1947; Reina and Hill 1978). There are several sites in the municipality that have the appropriate clay for pottery (in Chamaque, Tuijala, Chicalajaj, Tuizacaja, and Ixmoco towards Chamaque), and it is in these communities that women specialized in utilitarian pottery production for local and regional use.

Pottery production has historically been a predominantly female activity within Mayan civilization, although men may assist to dig and transport the raw clay, and to transport and sell the final product. Pottery technology in rural communities like Comitancillo has changed little over the centuries. The method is completely manual with practically no tools involved. Although the Spanish introduced the pottery wheel during the Colonial Period, this technology was taken up by men; and is practiced in only three, more urban Mayan centres (Antigua, Totonicapán, and Jalapa) (Reina and Hill 1978:21).

Five of the women (5/19) had mothers who were pottery makers (Paula, Pilar, Herminia, Malena, and Josefa), and as girls they assisted their mothers with the process. Pottery making is a largely an inherited vocation that mothers pass on to their daughters. Mining the clay, transporting it to the household, and preparing it for molding were among the non-skilled tasks undertaken by other family members, particularly the girls. The arduous process of grinding the clay into powder, and then slowing adding water to make it the correct consistency often fell to the young girls.

The technique used in Comitancillo, and much of the central highlands, is called "orbiting," while in other parts of Guatemala a range of more static "molding" methods are used. Paula, one of the informants who continues to produce pottery at the age of 65, demonstrated the production process. She starts with a large mass of clay placed on a board on the ground. She forms a concavity in the centre, and proceeds to raise the walls by lifting the clay between two hands. She side-steps around the pot to maintain symmetry, forming the top first. Then she inverts the pot and does the same to form the bottom. The only tool used is a corncob that is rolled over the surface of the pot to smooth and draw up the sides near the end of the formation process. This method of production, the "orbiting" technique, requires a great deal of skill, muscular control, and stamina on the part of the potter. The pots are then dried (more easily done in the dry season), and fired. The pottery from this municipality is not slipped or burnished, like that of other regions, which makes it most suitable for boiled foods rather than fried or stewed foods.

The main products are large water carriers (*tinajes* or *cántaros*), cooking pots (*ollas*), flat grills for tortillas (*comales*), and jugs (*jarros*). Comiteca potters produce strictly utilitarian pottery without decoration of any kind; they do not produce products for strictly artistic, religious, or tourist purposes.

Paula (60) says that she works on two or three pots every day, producing about six in total by the end of the week. She has done this every week of her life, and expects "to be buried with my tools." Either her husband carries the pots on his back in light wooden frame with a trumpline (*cacaste*) to market; or if there are not very many, she and her husband each carry a couple in their arms. She says that today (1990s), she sells them for Q2.00 each (about $0.40 Can).

In addition to selling products in the local market on Sundays, the pottery from Comitancillo was sold in San Pedro/San Marcos and Quetzaltenango, the nearest regional markets in the highland Mayan economy. Itinerant merchants, (*comerciantes*), also sold the Comiteca pottery in smaller communities and markets throughout southwestern Guatemala. For example, Herminia's father carried the pots to market in Tapachula, a town on the Mexican border; Malena took pots to sell in the Tejutla market with her father; and Graciela's father-in-law sold his wife's pottery in the coastal communities of the department.

The usage of utilitarian pottery in the household has declined only slightly during the last century. Despite the increasing availability of cheap, and more durable and lighter weight tin, plastic, and porcelain containers, both Mayan and Ladino households continue to prefer ceramic cooking utensils for making maize foods. However, there has been a decline in the number of potters since the first part of the century. In 1949, there were reportedly 200 women producing pottery in Comitancillo (Morales 1949). Today in Comitancillo, there are an estimated 40 active potters who supply the several stalls in the local market that sell ceramic goods, and who continue to sell in the region. Of the five women in this sample whose mothers were potters, only one (Paula) learned the skill from her mother. She continues to produce pots for household and sale purposes, while none of the younger women in Comitancillo have perpetuated the tradition of pottery production.

Pottery-making skills are a source of pride for women, and their abilities are respected by others in the family and the community. For women with this particular vocation, the production of pottery is definitely a pocket of power and a space for individual agency in their lives; they are in control of the whole process, and everyone else quietly cooperates with their instructions. This dynamic was particularly evident in the interview and time spent with Paula. She was eager and proud to demonstrate her pottery-making techniques, and did so with quiet confidence and proficiency, while her husband sat silently observing the process in the corner of the patio. This situation was a sharp contrast to Paula's attempts to answer questions during the interview process, when she constantly deferred to her husband, and he controlled her responses and the length of the interview.

4.2. Weaving

4.2.1 Backstrap Weaving: A Female Domain

Weaving, like pottery, is another of the more enduring cultural practices that meet basic human needs as well as a means for the expression of community and individual identity and a woman's skills and capacity. Historically it is the ideal that all Mayan women know how to weave on the backstrap loom and produce the clothing for themselves and their families (e.g., Bunzel 1952; Tax 1953).

The backstrap loom is the traditional method of cloth production, originating in pre-Hispanic Mayan society. In Comitancillo, the majority of women know how to weave on a backstrap loom (*telar de palitos*); however, the role of this activity within the household has shifted over time.

As with pottery, other household members, particularly girls who will eventually be weavers themselves, assist with the preparation of materials for artisan production. The lengthy process of hand-spinning the raw cotton, dyeing if necessary, and preparing the warp threads is done with the assistance of the young female household members.

Then the skilled weaver or the young apprentice does the actual weaving. The backstrap loom consists of a series of seven or more slender sticks upon which the warps are bound. A larger smooth, shaped stick is used as a sword or batten. The highland backstrap loom has no frame, fittings, nor any device that fastens any two parts together. Supporting ropes suspend the loom from a tree or post, and the other end is looped around the seated weaver. A woman seated at a backstrap loom tied to a porch post in her patio is a common sight throughout the Guatemalan highlands, and particularly in Comitancillo. The loom and textile in process are easily portable and storable, when the woman must tend to her other domestic responsibilities after several hours of weaving.

Although Comitancillo was well known as a wool-producing area, there appears to have been little production of wool textile products, unlike places like Momostenango that specialized in the fabrication of wool blankets. The only hint of wool products is in a report from 1880 that community members knitted wool socks and gloves (Gall 1976); however, none of the women in this sample had knowledge of wool goods being produced on a significant scale in the first half of the twentieth century.

The vast majority of textiles produced in Comitancillo are made of cotton. Unlike pottery for which the raw materials are found locally, weavers in Comitancillo must purchase cotton for weaving from outside sources. In 1949, Morales reported that itinerant merchants sold cotton from the coast in the Comitancillo market for the production of cloth for serviettes and sheets, *huipiles* (women's blouses), and *moj* (the off-white cloth used in men's traditional dress).

The maximum width of cloth produced on the backstrap loom is about 50 centimetres; thus *fajas*, shawls, and serviettes can be produced on this loom, but *huipiles* are made of several panels of cloth sewn together. *Corte* material and *moj* material for men's clothing require wider pieces of cloth, and therefore cannot be produced on the backstrap loom.

All of the women indicated that their grandmothers or mothers produced all or at least the majority of the family's clothing on the backstrap loom. As girls, the women assisted their mothers to prepare the cotton or wool for weaving. Most learned as girls to weave on this type of loom, or learned as young married women when they felt the advantage of having a productive "art" to contribute to the household.

> I never learned to weave *fajas* when I was a child because no one taught me; I just watched how my mother did it. But my mother died when I was nine years old. So when I married I really wanted to learn to weave *fajas*, and one day I spoke with my grandmother, the mother of my deceased mother, because she was still alive. She said the following: I will teach you to weave *fajas* because there are men that begin to insult a woman that does not know an art. The next day she began to teach me to weave, only in this way did I learn an art. Even though my husband did not demand that I have an art, more it was that I myself decided to learn the art, and my husband never treated me badly, as is the case with other women. – Gabriela, 60

The majority of the clothing used in Comitancillo today is purchased in the market; however, all of the elderly women in this sample continue to weave on the backstrap loom, at least occasionally, and produce smaller items, such as serviettes, shawls, and *fajas* for household use and for sale. This continues to be one of the primary contributions of elderly women to the household economy, and an opening for considerable individual agency if women are so inclined.

4.2.2. Footlooms: A Male Domain

Footlooms (or treadle looms) were originally introduced to Guatemala by the Spanish, and became largely the domain of men (like the pottery wheels). Footloom production was more profitable than backstrap weaving because these mechanized wooden looms could produce larger pieces of cloth and do so more quickly. It was argued that women were not strong enough to operate the heavy wood beams and foot pedals; however, others argue that it is a common pattern that when a task that is traditionally female (weaving or pottery) becomes more productive through improved technology, it becomes a male domain (Bourque and Warren 1990).[4]

During the colonial period many weaving workshops with footlooms were established, and some highland towns began to specialize in cloth production (i.e.: Salcaja, Totonicapán, Quetzaltenango, San Pedro-San Marcos). Although even in the early part of the century some cloth was brought in from outside, in Comitancillo there were a significant number of local weavers in the communities that produced cloth for their own households as well as the local market. There was also a weaving workshop established in the first decade of the century in the town centre by the De Leon family, weavers from Salcaja (a predominant textile-producing town since the Colonial period). They primarily produced the cloth for the traditional clothing worn in the municipality (dark blue *corte* material, and off-white *moj* material for the men). Three of the women (Malena, María, Irma) indicated that their fathers or grandfathers produced cloth on a footloom. Many of the footloom weavers worked full-time weaving to produce 10-20 yards of cloth per week. The cloth was sold in the regional markets, as well as in the coastal communities (Feliciano 1996:99).

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[4] Interestingly, the present women's textile production cooperative in the community faced this issue when it purchased and trained its members to weave on footlooms. Many men objected, saying that women were not strong enough to work the large looms. The women felt challenged to prove that they could produce on the footlooms.

The predominance of men in footloom production makes the following account of a young girl forced to work one of these looms, all the more startling.

> When I was eight years old (1942) my parents put me to weave on a footloom, and I learned to weave *moj* cloth. But if I didn't weave or if I didn't produced ten *varas* [about a metre] in a day, then I received a sound insult from my parents. I had to produce 30 *varas* of cloth a week. The threads were strung on Monday, and I was obligated to finish the weaving by Saturday. This is the work I did when I was little. – Natalia, 66

Like pottery, woven products from Comitancillo did not have the refinement and intricate designs of artisan production elsewhere in the highlands; however, the weavers did produce durable utilitarian goods used locally and sold throughout the region at larger market centres and through itinerant merchants.

4.2.3. Traditional Clothing: Visible Identity

Each Mayan community in Guatemala has a distinctive, identifiable dress, for both males and females. This unique dress has origins in the Mayan civilization, and was further transformed and modified during the colonial period (Otzoy 1996:143-146). The essential elements of a women's clothing are a *huipil* (blouse) and a *corte* (a piece of cloth several metres long and about one metre wide that is wrapped around the waist several times). In addition, they have a *faja* (belt), a long band for their hair or head, and a shawl. Men's traditional dress consists of various combinations of pants or short wrap-around skirts, and shirts, plus hats and occasionally sandals.

Like the pottery and weaving in Comitancillo, the traditional clothing of the community members is quite simple, yet in some ways strikingly elegant, compared to the elaborate designs and vivid colours used elsewhere in the highlands. The traditional clothing of Comitancillo for women consists of a dark blue *corte*. Occasionally there were fine white lines at irregular intervals woven into the cloth. The *corte* is held in place by a *faja*, the woven belt about eight centimetres wide and several yards long that is wrapped around the waist many times. Possibly the most intricately designed item of the costume is the traditional Comiteca *faja*, which has a complex pattern of geometric and animal figures woven in black or blue and white thread. The *huipil* or blouse worn traditionally in Comitancillo is made of red woven material with thin yellow, green, and white horizontal strips about ten centimetres apart (O'Neale 1945: 262). According to Joaquina (56, Taltimiche), there were also tiny patterns woven into these coloured strips, although the most common ones today are without design.

The *huipiles* and *fajas* were woven at home, usually by the women on backstrap looms. In one case (María), a woman's grandfather wove the *huipiles* for the women in his household on a footloom; however, this is unusual. The *corte* required a footloom, because of the width of the material. Apparently, the weavers in Comitancillo could not produce enough of the dark blue *corte* material to meet the needs of the female population of the municipality; thus, *corte* material from other highland towns, particularly Salcajá, and Totonicapán, was sold in the Comitancillo market. The shortage of locally produced *corte* material is also the reason that the De León brothers from Salcajá immigrated to Comitancillo in the early 1910s; they established several weaving workshops in town to produce textiles for the local market.

Men's traditional clothing consisted of white cotton woven pants and shirt, with a wide red woven belt. Women comment that of course this white material was difficult to keep clean when men were working in the fields; so often they wore old clothes for fieldwork, and put on their Comiteco garb only for public activities and errands. The white material, called *moj*, was produced locally in Comitancillo on footlooms.

The clothing described above is the ideal; however, many of the older women commented that, due to poverty, they had very ragged clothing. Usually each family member had only had basic outfit, and ideally received a new set at the time of the yearly municipal fiestas. As young girls they wore remnants of their mother's old *cortes*, or even material from old sacks. They were always barefoot, as no one wore sandals or shoes. Many of the elderly women commented that it is only recently that they have had adequate clothing.

According to the women interviewed, all Comiteco women and men wore this traditional dress until as recently as the 1970s. Hawkins (1984) also notes that traditional clothing was still being worn by women in the community in the mid-1980s. In the past few decades, women in many Mayan communities have begun to wear *huipiles* and *cortes* from all over Guatemala. However, it is important to note that while the community-specific colours and patterns have been abandoned in many, but not all, communities in the highlands, the general clothing consisting of a *huipil, corte,* and *faja*, has not, and continues to be an immediate visual marker of ethnic identity particularly for women. It is women, and less often men, who bear the responsibility of displaying the identifiable symbols of their Maya-Mam identity to the outside world (Smith 1995:723).

Comiteco men, on the other hand, discontinued use of the traditional garb in the 1950s. They switched to Western-style pants and shirts, the uniform of the rural peasant. This is a fairly common pattern; men will adopt the clothing of the dominant culture as they are integrated into the working class of the national society; however, the women remain largely within the closed cultural community, maintaining and reproducing the traditional culture through such expressions as dress, language, and culturally-based subsistence activities.

While in recent years there has been a trend among Comiteca women to wear an array of beautiful *huipiles* and *cortes* from all over the Guatemalan highlands or to utilize plain generalized, mass-produced *cortes* and blouses, only a few of the elderly women continue to wear the simple blue *corte* and red *huipil* of Comitancillo,. Graciela associates her traditional blue *corte* and red *huipil* with a lack of education and humble roots. She considers other *huipiles* and *cortes* from other regions as too elegant, indicators of a higher status than she deserves.

> Until today, I have never thought to use any different type of clothing [than the traditional Comiteca *traje* of a blue *corte* and red *huipil*], nor will I think of it, because I know very well that I grew up only using the typical clothing of Comitancillo, even though I sometimes use other *huipiles.* I cannot use elegant clothes because I cannot write, nor even less, speak the Spanish language; therefore I know nothing more than that I grew up poor with my deceased grandparents. – Graciela, 61

The clothing preferred by each generation may be linked to women's perceived identity: elderly women still see themselves as members of a particular, discrete Mayan community, Comitancillo, while the younger women are increasingly identifying themselves as part of the larger Mayan population of Guatemala. This expanding Mayan identity will be further explored in chapter six.

5. "Penny Capitalism[5]": Comitancillo in the Regional Market System

As mentioned earlier, the Comitancillo market is held on Wednesdays and Sundays, and serves the needs of the adjacent communities as well as serving as a conduit for linking goods to regional markets in the network of highland markets in western Guatemala.

Mayan women have always been prominent in the highland markets, not only as buyers, but also as vendors (McBryde 1947:83; Tax 1953:89). In Comitancillo during the first half of the century, the Mam women largely sold the agricultural and crafts products from their own households in the central plaza where the outdoor market was held. They had temporary stalls in the market. Ladina women, who arrived in Comitancillo after the turn of the century, began to establish more permanent stalls along the north and south sides of the market. The archival records of the municipality indicate that all vendors paid a "tax" to have permission to sell in the market. For example, in 1890 the municipality received 13.62 pesos from market stalls taxes. The municipal and departmental authorities also monitored and enforced state health and sanitary regulations.

While women predominated in the local markets, Comiteco men were the itinerant merchants who traded goods between highland towns and in the larger regional markets. The pottery and woven goods produced by women for sale outside the municipality were marketed by men. Comitancillo also produced maguey rope, pigs, and sheep for the regional markets; these were purchased and transported by outside wholesalers coming to the local weekly markets, or by Comiteco itinerant merchants. While middle-aged women were not involved in regional marketing, young women often accompanied their fathers to sell (e.g., Manuela, Josefa, Graciela) either in the immediately neighbouring markets such as Tejutla or to the largest departmental market in San Pedro/San Marcos. They were confined to accompanying their fathers to markets that were less than a one-day journey. Several of the women had fathers involved in intra-regional trading, but none of the women participated in this activity at any age. In addition to the limitations on women's participation in trading due to their reproductive duties, women's lack of Spanish and propriety concerning women's behaviour outside the household in the public, non-Mayan domains, limited them to trading at the local market.

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[5] The phrase "penny capitalism" is taken from the title of Sol Tax's book, *Penny Capitalism: A Guatemalan Indian Economy* 1953.

During middle age many women had occasional stalls at the Comitancillo market, and later in life, when they were less constrained by the needs of young children and the demands of their parents-in-law, they might have a more permanent market stall. For example, Josefa has had a stall selling tropical fruit in the central plaza of town for the past two decades. Her husband is an itinerant merchant, and brings wholesale fruit from the coast for her to sell.

6. Forced Labour Migrations: The Impact on Women

The forced labour migrations of the first half of the twentieth century described in chapter three had differential impacts on women and on men. For men, work on the *finca* or on public works projects essentially replaced their regular work on their agricultural plots. For women, the extraction of men from the mutuality of rural production meant that they were left with a double burden. In a sense, the removal of men from the peasant household to participate periodically in the capitalist/cash economy of the coastal plantations or in the business of nation building and modernization (the construction of roads and railways) was accomplished by placing a double burden on women, and resulted in an overall decline in the productivity of the peasant subsistence economy. Men replaced one type of work with another; women picked up the shortfall, and assumed responsibility for the entire subsistence economy in the rural highland communities during their absence, which could be up to six months of the year. Even when women did work as wage labourers on the *fincas*, they continued to carry out their domestic/reproductive roles at the same time. They were responsible for feeding and cleaning their families, and tending the children, carrying the smallest one on their backs at all times, even during fieldwork.

Even before the men left, the women's workload increased, as the women prepared the men's food in advance for their time away from home.

> In earlier times [1930s], the people went to work by force in the maintenance of roads, and other work on the coast, according to what my departed father told me. He told me that they were forced to work, and that they had to take all their food with them for a month or more. He says they took with them food prepared from ears of corn, but not like tortillas or tamales, rather in a powdered form because they said that in this way it lasted longer [without going bad]. First they cook the ears of corn like maize, then the women began to grind it on the grinding stone, next they made tortillas with this *masa*, and lastly the women had to put the tortillas to dry in the sun for a long time until the tortillas were hard. Then the women once again had to grind the tortillas until they were a fine powder. This is the only food that they men took with them when they went to work on the coast. -Olívia, 57

And of course, with the men leaving for months at a time, the women were left with the burden of caring for the *milpa*, animals, and children, often with precarious resources. Elderly women tell about the lack of maize, and living off wild herbs and ground corncobs for food, while waiting for the men to return.

Migratory labour patterns figured prominently in the courtship patterns and early years of marriage for women in the first half of the twentieth century. Many young couples went to work on the *fincas* for the first years of marriage as a strategy to gain the necessary money to purchase land or build a house if they did not have an inheritance. For example, María (1920-30s), Pilar (1950s), and Jacinta (1950s) all spent the first years of married life as seasonal labourers on the *fincas*, or as *rancheros*, year-round *finca* labourers.

7. Healers and Midwives: Women's Public Roles

There were basically only two possible roles for Mayan women in the larger community arena: as healers and midwives (e.g., Oakes 1951:41-42; Bunzel 1952:92-93; Tax 1953:98; Paul 1974; Tedlock 1992). Women did not hold any positions of authority in the community, nor did they directly hold positions within the *cofradias* (religious brotherhoods responsible for attending specific saints), despite their roles as partner assistants when their husbands held such positions. However, women acted as healers and midwives, extensions of their roles are caregivers within the family, and were highly respected in these roles. The positions were critical "pockets of power" for women in the community at large, as well as in the lives of individual women.

Within this sample of 19 elderly Comiteca women, only one was a midwife and traditional healer, María, 90 years old, whose story appears in chapter one. Interestingly, she learned her skills while living as a young married woman on a *finca* for ten years. She learned through her own experience, through observation and through working with the Ladina midwives on the *finca*. However, her authority to be a midwife and healer comes from Mayan tradition: a baby born with the umbilical cord wrapped around twice is destined to be a midwife.

> I learned this on the *finca* when the midwives came to attend my babies, especially when they prepared medicines, and I observed how they were prepared. I had three children already when I learned this art. I was really very young when I started this work. One time I went to see a young girl who almost died in childbirth, but I was able to save her, and in this way the people told others that I could attend births...Until today many people come to look for me to attend births...My husband did not say anything when I went to attend births because every time I returned I gave him the money I earned, without keeping any for myself, and so he was very happy. When I returned home he would ask me how it went, if everything went well. I would respond that everything went well. Sometimes they paid with money, sometimes with rice or maize. – María, 90

María also described the challenge of the state health department in the 1970s and 1980s, as they tried to control, regulate, and standardize the practice of midwifery in the rural communities. She describes, with a smile, attending a workshop where she was asked to come to the front and write information on a chalkboard about her midwifery practices. She is completely illiterate. Many of the practicing midwives have not been issued Health Department permits to practice because they cannot meet basic education requirements.

Like pottery production, midwifery appears to be a disappearing art in the community; none of the younger women have followed in this path, although some are taking an interest in studying nursing and medicine. Western healthcare modalities are replacing and, in some cases, repressing traditional community practices. This is one pocket of power that women have lost, not to men within their own households or communities, but to outside authorities and ideology.

8. Marriage for the Grandmothers: Unequal Mutuality

The concept of complementarity and balance has long been central to Mayan thinking, particularly as it pertains to gender, household, and community relations and to the relationship between human beings and the natural world (Prado 1999:57-58). However, in terms of social relations there have always existed subtle stratifications within the household and the community based on gender, age, social status, and economic resources. "Unequal mutuality," the phrase used by Stern (1995:87) to describe the interdependent yet unequal relationship between husband and wife in late colonial Mexico, is also appropriate for marriage in highland Mayan communities in the twentieth century.

> ...Wives treated marriage as a formal pact that coordinated several arenas of right and obligation and that implied a certain mutuality of obligation between husbands and wives...In short, wives tended to treat marriage as a virtually indissoluble pact, an ongoing relationship of unequal mutuality that imposed permanent moral responsibilities on men...wives broke the pact only under the duress of extreme irresponsibility of husbands – dangerous violence, economic negligence akin to abandonment, or outright physical or sexual abandonment. (Stern 1995:86-87).

8.1. Potential Marriage Partners: Freedom within Boundaries

All of the women in the elderly cohort indicated that they had a choice about whom they would marry; however, they did not really have a choice about whether or not to marry, and they were strongly pressured by their parents to marry young. The women in this sample ranged from 13 to 20 years of age when they married for the first time (two were married twice), with an average age of 15.5 years. Parents cited two primary reasons for urging early marriages: to avoid pregnancy before marriage, and to end household distractions involved in courting and marriage negotiations (e.g:, Jacinta, Pilar, Natalia).

> I picked my own husband, although my parents told me to get married from very young. They said: "Get married now, we do not want you to be single because there are many young women who are getting pregnant without knowing who the fathers are. We do not want you to get into that kind of problem. So I married my husband, but he arrived personally to ask permission of my parents. –Natalia, 66

Marriage partnerships are also endogamous, largely within the individual *aldea,* and certainly at the municipal level, although no one specifically articulated this social rule of behaviour. Within the sample of older women, 8 out of 19 women (42%) married within their own *aldea*, usually a close neighbour; 8 out of 19 women (42%) married someone from an adjacent *aldea*; and two women (10%) married a person from a distant *aldea*, but still part of the municipality. Only one woman (5%) came from outside the municipality, in an adjacent municipality (Serchil), and married into Comitancillo. This fits with the "extremely high rate of community endogamy" noted among the highland Maya in general (Smith 1995:738).[6]

The group included 21 marriages, as two of the women were married twice. In slightly more than half (11 out of 21 marriages, or 55%) of cases, the young women met their future husbands while doing their regular duties or occasional errands in the community, such as herding sheep, bringing lunch to a brother, going to wash clothes, or helping their fathers sell in the market. They would talk a few times, and then the young man would come to the house to ask formal permission of her parents to visit her. Here are some examples of how a young woman, whose days followed a heavy schedule of household duties, and whom custom discouraged from interaction with young men, would meet a potential husband.

> I got to know him in this way: I had a brother who was an *auxiliar* [official *aldea* representative] and he came to the *auxiliatura* [community office] in our *aldea*, so my parents sent me to take him his food. Suddenly this man talked to me on the path, and in that way we got to know each other...As soon as we met that time, he went directly to ask permission of my parents. –Irma, 75

> I met my husband in the path because we had land in his *aldea* [a neighbouring community] and I always went there to pasture our sheep. – Guadelupe, 52

In 6 of the 21 cases (29%), the young woman had not ever met the man before he arrived at the house and asked to visit her. The informant suggested that he might have decided to visit her because he had seen her in the community and asked neighbours about her. These couples most closely followed the traditional ideal courtship pattern; young people were not supposed to speak to each other without the permission and supervision of her parents.

> We knew each other because our families live close by...He came directly to ask permission from my parents, it's not like today when young people talk in any place without their parents knowing...I had never talked to him until he arrived to ask for permission. – Josefa, 75

> I don't know how he arrived [at my house]. Maybe some people gave him information that I was single. It was a surprise when he came to ask permission of my parents. – Malena, 73

The dangers of speaking to a young man without the permission and supervision of her parents were prominent themes. An interesting common story included the problems that could happen in the household and community, if they spoke inappropriately.

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[6] In the 1970s, the Mayan rate of in-marriage was 90-95% in communities with an average population of 10,000, one of the highest rates of community in-marriage in the world (Adams and Kasakoff 1976).

> He arrived to ask permission directly with my father, although we had already spoken once on the path, but to speak formally, he had to talk first with my father. So my father told him that he could speak with me with much care, and he didn't have the right to touch me in the pasture, because if he touched me the sheep would escape and they would go into other people's *milpa*. –Guadelupe, 52

In several cases, three (Joaquina, María Fernanda, María) out of 21 (14%), the women met their future husbands on the *finca*. It is interesting to note that even there, where there were many people from all over the highlands, it appears that Comitecos preferred to marry others from their own community. Alternatively, it could be that inter-community couples took up permanent residence on the coast; and only Comiteco-Comiteca couples would be easily accepted in the community, and so returned to the highlands.

> Well, we [my first husband] got to know each other on the *finca*, or rather we had already been talking together without the permission of my parents. Afterwards, he came to ask my father's permission, but we had already been talking for a long time, we even arrived together to my house [to ask permission]. –Joaquina, 56

> We got to know each other on the *finca* because at that time we always went with my mother to the *finca* to cut coffee. I remember well that when I was a young woman there were not very many young women; one only saw a few and they married very quickly, at about 13 years...I was 13 years old when my husband came to ask permission of my stepfather and my mother on the *finca*. I married at 14 years. – María Fernanda, 65

There was only one woman in the sample who married into Comitancillo from an outside community. María Eugenia was raised in a neighbouring municipality (Serchil), and met her Comiteco husband when he came to play in a marimba band in her area. She is of indigenous descent, but did not speak Mam when she arrived; but she had adapted over the years to the language, dress, and customs of Comitancillo. As an outsider, she adopted the cultural patterns and symbols of the community, in order to be fully integrated and accepted into the life of the community. The necessity to adapt to local customs is one of the impediments to outsiders marrying into the community.

8.2. Customary Patterns of Meeting and Courtship

The ritual of asking for permission and then "talking" to the young woman was sometimes difficult for the interested young man. All of the women indicated that they were not forced into marriage with a particular man; they had a choice, and did so voluntarily. Young women frequently gave their beaus a difficult time in order to establish the extent of their determination and interest. Olívia gives a detailed, dramatic description of the anxieties of a young man asking permission, and the tactics of the young woman involved.

> The mother of the young man would get up at three o'clock in the morning to grind his food, [because] he had to eat first before going to the house of the young woman. If he didn't eat first, he could be faint/dizzy with hunger, and trembling with fear about whether the young woman and her parents would accept him. After eating, he would arrive [at her house] before seven o'clock in the morning. They would go early because they think that if they go later then the father of the girl would not be home. It's better to go early, because at that time they would be eating breakfast. When he arrives, he asks permission to see the daughter. The girl's father would answer: "Well, for me, there is no problem, but we have to see what the girl will have to say." The young woman is not standing or sitting around; she is working, making food, sweeping, or grinding. She is doing many things just to convince the young man. If she likes him she will laugh or smile; if not she will be angry: " I don't know who this man is, he comes from far away like a crazy man." – Olívia, 57

There was also considerable discussion among household members about the positive and negative attributes of each beau.

> So my parents asked me if I wanted to speak to this young man, but the fact was that I did not want that man for my husband, and he went away without a positive response. My mother told the young man this: "My daughter is of a young age, what use will she be to you, because I'm sure that you want her to make your food, wash your clothes, and other work, but the truth is that she cannot do anything." But it turned out that he continued to bother me for one year. He hardly left me in peace, and by this time I turned 14 years old. So my stepfather told me: "Young woman, marry this man. Why don't you want to marry him? As if your husband will come in an airplane. Since he wants to marry you so much, marry him...But in truth, I did not respond because I didn't like that man. My mother always said to my stepfather: "Let my daughter be – what does it matter to us if people marry or not, it's not obligatory. Anyway, that man can look for another young woman...Maybe he has defects, and for that reason he has not gotten a wife." But in the end, I married that man at 14 years of age, and with my own will, not because I was forced. – María Fernanda, 65

8.3. Marriage Ceremonies and Significance

The marriage ceremony was held in the home of the bride with both families in attendance. The ceremony had two major functions: 1) it sanctioned the union between the woman and man in front of all the relatives, and 2) it reminded the young couple of their respective duties and responsibilities within marriage. Natalia and Olívia describe the marriage ceremonies of the 1930s.

> Before there were customs when a person married which were rules in each family. The young couple had to kneel before their elders; and receive the wisdom from each member of the family, taking their hands as a symbol of the commitment as a couple forever.

> When I married, they did that to me. My parents and the others told us: "Okay, young people, sit down together, and don't look at our faces [have your heads bowed] and we had to pass by on our knees, and bow in front of each elder. They said their advice to us in this way: "You as a young woman will marry today, but we charge you with much work, to sweep well the house of your parents-in-law, and don't let it get dirty because you are going to care for them from today on," my parents told me. Other things they told me were that I had to grind the maize on the grinding stone and wash the plates of my parents-in-law. – Natalia, 66

> When the day arrived for the young woman to go to the house of her husband, the young man had to bring two or three baskets of bread to her house, and other things to share with all the relatives at the moment of ceremony. The young couple had to kneel before their parents and the rest of their relatives to receive their respective advice, wisdom. Afterwards, the parents of the girl would walk with her to the house of the parents of the young man. Of course they had to give the young bride her things, like her serviettes, clothing, etc. – Olívia, 66

A small "dowry" went with the young woman, mostly her personal clothing, but also some serviettes, used in the kitchen for serving food, and her weaving or pottery tools. At another level, women bring productive resources, namely land and/or artisan skills, into the marriage, which remain her personal property; they are not transferred to the husband's family. However, the products of the land and of her *arte* (artisan skills) contribute to the subsistence of her husband's household.

In addition, a small bride price was commonly passed from the groom's family to the bride's, although this was more symbolic act than an actual transfer of significant household resources. The bride price usually consisted of a small amount of money, equivalent to the value of a sheep or a pig.

> Before, there were many special celebrations when people got married. Before, young people respected their parents more...The young man had to arrive to ask permission of the parents of the young woman if they could be beaus or not, and then also had to leave money for the parents of the woman as a compensation or a price for the woman. My parents received 30 Quetzales from my first husband as a compensation for the sacrifices that they made for me, and there were many celebrations and ceremonies when I married...They say that they paid for the young woman when she married because of the sacrifice the parents made to raise her when she was young. –Malena, 73

In the following case in the municipal court from 1930, the betrothed groom provides a form of bride service to the bride's family. It is also evident in this case that while young women had a certain amount of choice about their marriage partner, once a decision was made, and the ritual exchanges agreed upon, the young couple were rigidly bound by the agreement.

> First Municipal Tribunal, Sta. Cruz Comitancillo, the seventh of June in 1930.
> Given that: Now at four o'clock in the afternoon, Agustin Orozco presented himself as a representative of his mother, Concepción Gabriel, and as the one responsible for his niece, Dionicia Orozco, stating that: Dionicia Orozco had a commitment of marriage with Atanacio Aquilón who asked for her, and for this reason he [Atanacio Aquilón] took up residence in the house of the aforementioned niece and he worked for one month, as this was the formal agreement with the grandmother of the betrothed and the man [Agustin Orozco, her uncle] who is responsible for her. However, it happened that this niece [Dionicia Orozco] made a new commitment with Matilde Velasquez and with whom she is planning to elope.
> Therefore: The below signed Municipal Judge applies the Article 454, Points 6 & 7 of the Common Criminal Code on both the accused with the punishment of 10 days in prison.
> Signed by Apolonio Marroquin and J. Olegario Calderon
> On the same date, in the office and present the indigenous persons Dionicia Orozco and Matilde Velasquez (man), both of legal age of 20 years, born and residing in the Aldea of Tuichelupe...[missing the rest of the document]

If a young woman followed the customary practices in the courtship and marriage processes, then she was guaranteed the support of her family of origin if there were problems in the marriage, and, if necessary, she could return to her father's household.

> I have a daughter who married with permission, but it happened that there was a problem between them...So we returned the money to the man that he had left for my daughter, and he did not come back to bother my daughter again. In this way, if a daughter marries with the permission of her parents, then her father has the right and the obligation to resolve problems that occur in the life of his daughters. On the other hand, if the daughter marries without the permission of her parents, then they have no obligation to intervene in the problems of their daughters or sons. – Gabriela, 60

A case from 1957 in the Municipal Justice of the Peace records illustrates the seriousness and binding nature of requests to visit and agreements to marry. On June 12 1957, José Ramirez accused Pedro Miranda, a 19 year-old man from Tuimuj, a distant *aldea*, of deceitfulness in his intentions towards his daughter, María Eugenia Ramirez. Apparently, Pedro had come to the house and asked José for permission to marry his daughter, and after the appropriate rituals she went to live in his home.

> She had been living there for eight days, when he [her new husband] disappeared without saying anything, deceiving them in this way, and when they complained to Pedro, he abused them both verbally and physically, causing injuries to both of the them [father and daughter] that required four days to heal.[7]

Given the seriousness of the crime, both the violation of the marriage agreement and the perpetration of grave assaults on his new wife and her father, Pedro Miranda was sentenced to 20 days in jail.

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[7] *Juzgado de Paz,* Municipality of Comitancillo, June 12 1957.

Recourse to the family of origin to assist with marital problems was clearly evident in the sample of women here. Pilar returned several times to her father's house when her husband was abusive and drunk. Malena returned to her father's house when her first husband died in a measles epidemic. Joaquina returned to her father's house when her first husband was abusive.

8.4. Patrilocal Post -Marital Residence

As mentioned above, the overwhelming pattern in Comitancillo is patrilocal post-marital residence. With the exception of two cases, all of the women in this older generation went to live with their husband's family. The two exceptions were in cases in which the woman's family was distinctly better off in terms of land and resources than the husband's. In these cases, the husband did several years of work for the woman's family, a type of bride service.

A consequence of this inheritance/residency pattern is that it provides resident daughters-in-law for household labour. Daughters-in-law are responsible for the bulk of the onerous task of grinding maize for animal feed and household consumption. This arduous, unrelenting, daily burden will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter. For now, however, it is important to note that the task of grinding corn required as much as nine hours of work a day in large households. It was an advantage for a family if the oldest sons married in their late teens, so that a resident daughter-in-law would be added to the household labour pool. Daughters-in-law were given heavier workloads than daughters, and many of the women interviewed complained bitterly about this practice. Inter-generational and inter-family tensions between the female members of the household were frequent according to the recollections of the women in the sample and the evidence of the records of disputes brought before the local tribunal discussed later in this chapter.

8.5. Relationships within the Household

Patrilocal post-marital residence contributed to and reinforced the subordinate position of young wives within an intergenerational pattern of stratified authority. A young wife was firstly, with everyone else in the household, under the authority of the family patriarch (her father-in-law);

secondly, she was directly accountable to her mother-in-law, who strictly supervised her labour and physical movements; and thirdly, she responded to her husband.

Within this hierarchy, various alignments of household members could occur in intra-household conflict: inter-generational polarization, gender-based rifts, or kinship-based alignments and divisions. As a newly married woman, 15 years of age, Josefa recalls that her young husband often sided with her against the older generation.

> In truth they treated me somewhat badly. My parents-in-law were very angry with me because I did not have a baby right away after we were married, but rather it was three years after we had gotten together. So my parents-in-law complained a lot to my husband, saying: Why do you two still not have a child; we want a grandchild. The problem is that my husband was their only son. So my father-in-law said to me: Well, since you do not have a child, you can go collect firewood, hoe the fields, and do other work [work usually for men or women not caring for children]...However, my mother-in-law was good to me, and she said: if you obey me you will have a long life with your children, and you have to take care of the inheritance that we will leave you; if this is the case, then one of your sons will take care of you [in your old age].
>
> They were also angry with me because I did not know any *arte* [craft-making skills]. They said to me: "Why don't you know how to do a craft? As if daughters-in-law cannot do anything." But thank God I found someone to teach me how to make woven belts...When I learned my parents-in-law were very happy. – Josefa, 75

Josefa's story not only illustrates inter-generational tensions, but also the responsibility of the young wife to contribute both productively to the household and reproductively to carry on the family line. The fact that her father-in-law sent her to collect wood, the usual job of young children and elderly women, or work in the fields like a man, highlights the fact that she is not doing her duty as a wife. The irony is that Josefa eventually had 21 pregnancies, although only eleven of the babies survived infancy. And her mother-in-law's prediction that the patriarchal bargain would eventually pay off for her in her own old age eventually became true, although maybe in a slightly different way than expected. Rather than living with sons who cultivate the land, Josefa now has several highly educated sons, including two with university graduate degrees, who conscientiously support her.

Pilar tells of the severe discipline she suffered at the hands of her father-in-law because of her husband's failure to fulfill his responsibilities as a husband and son, because of his alcohol addiction.

> My father-in-law wove on a footloom making *huipiles rojos* (red blouse), and *tela moj* (white cloth), while I worked making *fajas* (belts) on a backstrap loom. When

> lunchtime arrived, my parents-in-law entered to eat with their whole family, and I stayed working outside. When they finished eating, they threw the shells of the avocado near where I was weaving, while I was suffering from much hunger. When my father-in-law finished eating he would say to me that if I was hungry I could go and grind maize on the grindstone, but only if I had purchased the maize myself; if not, I had no right to eat. I didn't say anything to them; meanwhile, my husband was out in the street drinking, and never came home. - Pilar, 57

In this case, Pilar was punished because of her husband's irresponsibility. Pilar's parents-in-law expected her to be an asset to the household economy, not to draw on the household resources. Despite her contribution in the household economy through textile production, she could not make up for the loss of her husband's input in the household economy.

Although women were expected to demonstrate respectful obedience towards their parents-in-law and their husbands, there were rigorous community sanctions on abuse within these relationships. Several cases of parents-in-law abusing young women are recorded in the municipal records of the local justice tribunal. For example, on February 16 1953, María Santos Salvador accused her husband, Pedro Jesus Temaj, and her mother-in-law, María Temaj, of beating her with a stick during a domestic dispute. After investigating the case, her husband was sentenced to ten days in jail, and her mother-in-law to five days.

The respect that women are expected to show their husbands is clearly evident in several Justice of the Peace cases from the period. November 13 1932, José Miranda accused his wife, Heriberta Ramirez, 23 years old, of "failing to treat him with the respect owed to a husband, and mistreating him verbally." When she was interrogated about this accusation, she could not demonstrate the contrary; and therefore she was found guilty of assault against a person, and sentenced to pay a fine. On November 15 1946, Felipe López accused his wife, 20 year-old María Pilar Gómez, of insulting him verbally and failing to show respect. María defended herself, insisting that she lacked respect for her husband because he came home angry and beat her unjustly. In the end they were both given five-day jail sentences.

Several women commented in the interviews that relationships between sisters-in-laws and brothers-in-law within the household were often sources of tension as well. Conflicts centered on division of labour, resource access and allocation, and the adjustments of living with new household members. The court records of Comitancillo record many cases involving these types of disputes. For example, conflict became so severe in the Crisóstomo household that on February 16 1929, Emilio Crisóstomo and his wife Angelina Aquilon made a formal complaint to the municipal Justice of the Peace regarding his brother, Eusebio Crisóstomo, and his wife Maria Jesus Peréz. The judge ascertained that there were insults and jealousies among all four of them, and sentenced all four to 20 days in jail. In another case on June 12 1929, Paula Isidro charged her brother-in-law and her sister with verbal abuse; and they were both sentenced to eight days in jail.

8.6. Marriage as a Pivotal Point

One of the pivotal points in a woman's life is marriage. Particularly for women growing up and entering marriage in the first part of the century, choosing a marriage partner was one of the few major life decisions they made on their life path; and this decision affected, to a large degree, the nature of the rest of their lives. The shape of women's lives in this Mayan highland community was predetermined by cultural patterns, survival strategies, and external structures; however, choosing a marriage partner was the major exception to this pattern. Women had almost complete freedom to choose their marriage partner, and this choice was critical because it had a major impact on their lives. A common theme that arose in the conversations with these women was the dramatic change that occurred in their lives at that crucial juncture. Either life was better before, and became very difficult afterward; or it was difficult before, and in an effort to escape they chose a particular marriage partner, sometimes with a positive outcome, sometimes not. Listen to the women describe the significant changes they experience when they married.

> I was 17 when I married; but after I married, I suffered a lot with my husband because [his family was] very poor and they always went to work on the *finca*. I never went to the *finca* when I lived with my father...he just worked the land. So when I married, I got to know the *finca* for the first time. –Gabriela 60

> We never went to the *finca* [when I was young], although my family was poor, but my parents struggled for us to live at home...I helped my mother grind clay for making pots, and learned to weave *fajas* [belts], and with this work I helped a little to cover the costs of the family. I married at 15 years. But when I married at this age, I suffered very much with my parents-in-law and with my husband. When I married I had to go to the *finca* with my husband. We went by foot to a *finca* near the border with Mexico...and in truth, I suffered a lot. –Pilar, 57

> I married very young (at age 15) because I did not want to live with my parents because of the bad treatment they gave me. So I thought it was better to get married and distance myself from those problems, but it happened to be worse with my husband; he began to beat me and insult me...I lived a very sad life. –Joaquina, 56

Only two women in this older sample were married twice: one because her first husband died in an epidemic, and the second one because her husband left her to live with another woman. A woman who was a widow or a woman separated from her first husband was expected to marry a widower, or to remain single and live in the household of a close male relative. Because of the limited number of potential marriage partners and their responsibilities towards their children from their first marriage, widowed and separated women thought strategically and carefully about their options before deciding to remarry.

In the case of Joaquina, whose physically and psychologically abusive first husband took a second wife, she had the community sanction to leave him and remarry; but after her first negative experience, her decision on a second husband was a very thoughtful one.

> We separated because he had already found another woman and was constantly beating me, and throwing me out of the house. So I decided to leave him, and I went to live in the house of my parents, but he came to look for me. Maybe he was trying for a year to convince me to return to live in his house, but I ignored him because he was already living with his lover. I was living 1.5 years with my parents, and then I married my present husband, because I did not want to be alone as my first husband was still bothering me.
>
> In truth, there were many young men who came to ask my father for permission to visit me,...but I did not accept any of them because I know very well that I was like a widowed woman. I already had three children, but two had died, and I only had one left. So I thought that if I married a young man, maybe in the future he would complain that I was a widow, that I had already had three children, or some other problem. I thought it would be better to marry a widower like myself. My present husband had been a widower for 5 years and had 5 children when I arrived to live in his house. I had many problems with his children, but with him we have never fought until today. Everything has gone well in our life together. – Joaquina, 56

9. Reproductive Responsibilities

9.1. Pregnancy, Childbirth, and Infant Mortality

The high pregnancy rates and dismal infant mortality rates of the highland Mayan population in the first part of the century are clearly evident in Comitancillo. Of the elderly women sampled, there was an average of 11 pregnancies per woman, and 3.2 infant deaths. Thus of every four children born, at least one died in infancy. Maternal mortality rates were also high at the time; three of the 19 women lost their mothers during or as a result of childbirth.

Curiously, the majority of the women indicated that while they went to the midwives for regular check-ups during pregnancy, they preferred to give birth without the attendance of a midwife after the first or second pregnancy. Often they gave birth completely on their own, without anyone with them during labour and delivery. Sometimes a female relative was with them, or even a husband or father-in-law circulating near by. The female relatives would take over immediately after the birth: caring for the baby, and feeding and washing the mother. It was customary for women to take 40 days for rest after a birth, and have daily baths in the *chuj* (traditional steam bath) to aid in the healing process.

Several women indicated that midwives were paid a higher price for the delivery of a boy baby than a girl.

> If it is a boy, they charged Q15, because a boy will work, will till the land, that is to say that he will earn money, so they charge more. If a girl is born, they will only charge Q5 because she will not work, she isn't useful for anything. She does not have the strength of a man.
>
> At this time there was a lot of discrimination against girls. For example, when a girl was born, the father would get mad...and say: Why did a girl have to be born? She won't serve for anything...As if she will till the land, carry firewood, etc. ...But if a boy was born, then the fathers had a fiesta. They began to drink rum...They said: How nice! What happiness that a boy was born! He will do much work, he is able to earn money...he will work in the fields. – Olivia, 57

Apparently, the birth of a girl was not celebrated because the work she did in the household was not valued as much as that of a male. Ironically, women worked longer hours than men; and no man could survive without a female in the household to prepare his food, wash his clothes, and prepare his bath, all tasks that no man will do.

9.2. Care of the Sick and Elderly

The practical care of the sick and elderly within the household is a primary task of women, as part of their general responsibility for the wellbeing and reproduction of the family. Women cultivated small herb gardens that provide the medicinal plants used for the treatment of common ailments. The preparation of the appropriate foods and the *chuj*, steam bath, for the sick and elderly were part of woman's domestic work. Until recently the only outside assistance for dealing with illness were the local healers and Mayan priests. The women in this sample described the practice of these traditional healers with mixed feelings, describing both positive and negative outcomes from the medicines and ceremonies of these practitioners.

Epidemics of infectious diseases have a long history among the Maya. Devastating epidemics ravaged the Maya after the arrival of the Spanish, almost completely eliminating the Mayan peoples, and regularly afflicted them during the colonial period. It has only been since about 1950 that the Mayan population of Guatemala recovered to the pre-Spanish level (Lovell & Swezey 1982), despite several epidemic outbreaks that occurred during the first half of the century in the Guatemalan highlands. The influenza epidemic of 1918 that affected the entire world also ravaged Guatemala, infecting hundreds of thousands and killing an estimated 100,000 people (10% of the total population of the country) between October and December of 1918 (Adams 1997:317). The Mayan communities were particularly devastated by this virus; about 20% of the indigenous population died. The municipality of Comitancillo was the most severely affected in the department of San Marcos, and possibly in the whole country. In this municipality, in only one week, approximately 80% of the population fell ill. Between October 1918 and April 1919, a total of 1048 people died of the influenza, 925 of these in the month of December 1918.[8] Using the 1921 Census as a reference, this means that about 10% of the population died in one month. The deaths were geographically concentrated within the municipality: all the deaths occurred in 14 *caserios* and *aldeas*, except for six deaths in the town, and almost half (464) occurred in three *caserios* (Chicajalaj, San Isidro, Tuimuj). Mortality was closely associated with ethnicity: except for one reported Ladino death, all of the 999 casualties of the epidemic in Comitancillo were Mam. In contrast, the neighbouring municipality of San Lorenzo, a mainly Ladino community, reported only 55 deaths during the epidemic (2.5% of its total population).

An epidemic of this magnitude impacts different members of the household in different ways according to gender and generation. Maria Malena' s experience of the measles epidemic that swept Comitancillo in the late 1940s reveals some of the gendered ways that its effects were felt at the household level. Malena was a recently married woman of 20 years old when the epidemic hit. During the epidemic, the whole household became sick, including her husband and infant son. She had to care for all the sick in the household and prepare the meals, even though she was also sick and there was a severe shortage of food. Eventually her husband and baby died. Even though her mother-in-law wanted her to stay, Malena's father insisted that she return to his house. Without a husband in the household, she would have had very little influence and assurance of fair treatment. As a widow, even at the young age of 20, and without children, her future marriage prospects were restricted. Shortly after she returned home, a widower who had lost his wife in the epidemic came to ask her to marry him. He had six small children when she married him. The youngest was still a baby that she carried on her back. The children accepted her as their own mother. She had another nine children with her second husband. The workload was heavy; she says:

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[8] All data on the 1918 epidemic from AGCA *Jefetura Político de San Marcos 19*18

> "I suffered a lot, because I had to grind corn for the whole family, I had to wash clothes in the river with a baby on my back, and when I returned I always had to carry water from the well. – Malena, 73

10. Male Alcoholism: Ladina Women Profit, Mam Women Suffer

Alcohol has a long history within the Mayan communities as an integral part of community ceremony and celebration, as a vital, contested part of the local economy, and as the root of acute social problems (e.g., Eber 1995). The departmental and municipal governments strictly controlled the sale of alcohol during the twentieth century, as it was a highly profitable source of revenue for both levels of government. Interestingly, the majority of the licensed alcohol vendors and *cantina* (bar) operators in Comitancillo in the first decades of the twentieth century were Ladina women (e.g., Clara Luz Fuentes was granted a liquor license on May 15 1937, by the municipal authorities).

The involvement and influence of the Ladino residents in the sale of alcohol is illustrated in a dispute that occurred in 1908 between the municipal officials and Srta. Delfina De León, the director of the school for girls in town. According to several letters to the *Jefe Politico* in San Marcos in the AGCA, Srta. De León describes herself as single, of age, a resident of

Comitancillo, and a member of the original de León family that settled in Comitancillo at the turn of the century. The Military Commissioner and the Municipal Secretary, Nicolas Ramirez, stated that Srta. De León did not report to start classes on time at the beginning of the year, and that she was selling liquor in the local schools with the result that drunken men were entering the school.

The clandestine production and sale of *cucha* (homemade liquor) in the communities appears to be then, as now, largely outside the control of the department authorities. Ironically, it was often the Mayan women who sold homemade rum produced from fermented wheat in the *aldeas*. The following case from the Justice of the Peace files refers to this type of operation.

> June 12 1968
> Given that: At 11 o'clock Mrs. María Cruz Pérez presented herself, with a charge against Francisco Dionicio Bail, because in a state of drunkenness, he arrived at 9 o'clock today in her house, asking that she sell him rum and then making improper propositions and rude comments about the morals of this woman, wanting to make her his, which she refused.
> Result: The present Mr. Francisco Dionicio Bail [incomplete record]

It was accepted behaviour that men would periodically drink to the point of drunkenness. Market days and celebrations were the primary drinking occasions. The extent of the alcohol consumption is evident in that a full one-third of the cases in the Justice of the Peace records between 1920 and1960 concern public drunkenness and related misbehaviours. The majority of cases involve men, as very few women drank alcohol. There were strong social taboos against women drinking. However, in several cases, women were named within a group of people who were drunk and causing public disorder.

The binge drinking of men impacted the lives of women and the work they needed to do for survival.

> I remember that when I was a girl we did not have enough food. We were each given a few tortillas to eat with cooked herbs because my parents were very poor and he [my father] drank a lot...There was maize available to purchase, but my father did not buy it because he had no money as he was always drinking rum. – Natalia, 66

Of course, excessive alcohol consumption often resulted in abuse within the family. Many of the cases in the Justice of the Peace records cite alcohol consumption as the trigger for wife abuse. For example, on December 16 1927, Valencia Perez accuses her husband of threatening her while he was drunk, and he was sentenced to five days in jail. A rare Municipal tribunal case on June 15 1933, indicates that an alcoholic woman was the source of problems within the family. In this case, Simon Salvador accused his wife, Petrona Matias, of insulting him without cause when she was drunk. She pleads guilty, saying that it was a complete mistake, but is still sentenced to pay a fine.

11. Formal Education: A New Possibility

In the 1890s the Comitancillo municipal records note the establishment of the first school, largely for town Ladino children. By November 1918 there were three schools in Comitancillo. Throughout the first half of the twentieth century the number of schools slowly grew, until by 1950 there were 13 schools in the municipality. However, the schools were still concentrated in the most accessible and highly populated communities.

Despite the emphasis of the national liberal government on education, attendance in the Comitancillo schools was very low during the first half of the century. As in peasant societies all over the world, education was not immediately viewed as useful, when the families' primary needs were for hands to help with the heavy load of agricultural and domestic work that was critical to survival.

None of the 18 women in this cohort had any formal education. All of them did their interviews with a Mam-Spanish interpreter because none of them felt comfortable enough to do the entire interview in Spanish, although some of them had basic Spanish conversational abilities. None of these women learned to read or write as children, either in Spanish or Mam (which became a written language only in the last three decades). Two of the women, both younger, aged 56 and 57 years, learned basic literacy skills as adults.

Many women recall being hidden by their parents when the teachers came around to register children for school. The most common story the women told was that their parents hid them in the *chuj*, the small hut used for the traditional steam bath, when the teachers came.

> A time came when the Ladinos arrived in the house to register the children so they could go to school, but my deceased parents said to us: Go hide in the *chuj*; especially you girls do not have the right to enter school because you will only go to "count the plates in the house of someone else" [you will get married and do only housework]. - Natalia, 66

> I did not study at all because my deceased parents did not give me the opportunity to study, not even for a few years. Each time when the people came by to register students, my parents also told us to hide in the *chuj*... "I do not have money for you to waste time in school, and anyway we have a lot of work in the house, so therefore you do not have the right to go to school," my father said. - Manuela, 58

Then, as now, people identify poverty as the main reason for not sending their children to school. All of the 18 women born before 1950 cited lack of resources as the main reason they did not go to school.

> I never went to school because at that time, my parents were poor and had no money; we didn't have food, much less for the expenses of school. -María Fernanda, 65

> I never studied because my parents were poor; they didn't even have money to buy something for us to eat, much less for studies for us. -Monica, 76

Others, such as Graciela (61, Chamaque), did not study because there was no school in their community. Still others cited socio-cultural reasons for not educating children in this period. For example, some thought that it was unnecessary and irrelevant to their lives as Mayan peasants and labourers; others felt that education would instill Ladino values in children, and that they would lose respect for their elders. Still others held a deep suspicion of the motives of the Ladino teachers.

The municipal records indicate that community authorities attempted to force parents to send their children to school by occasionally levying fines against parents on non-attending children (for example, in 1923, five fathers in Chixal were fined); however, the enforcement seems to have been sporadic and ineffective in promoting school attendance.

12. Ethnic/Gender Identities and Relationships

During the first half of the twentieth century, ethnicity, gender, and class variables were woven together in a configuration of specific roles and relationships within Comitancillo. Inside the Mam communities, where outsiders did not penetrate, there was a largely interdependent, although unequal, economic relationship within the household between men and women. At the community level, women held community roles as midwives, healers, and as partners in *cofradia* activities; and were respected and protected as biological and cultural reproducers of community, and valued economic producers.

Despite the relatively equitable status of women and men in the Mayan community, it was not an egalitarian society by any definition. There was a measure of stratification within the Mayan community, largely based on prestige and power gained through ritual and community leadership activities, and to a lesser degree based on one's access and control of resources and land. As is evident among the informants, some lived in households that had enough land to support the entire family for the whole year and some even hired outside labourers to work their fields, while in other households, the men had to hire themselves as day labourers on neighbouring farms or migrate to the coastal plantations to earn enough money to provide for their families. There was a stratum of Mayan men who were the predominant municipal leaders and judges, and a smaller handful still who were the primary links between the Mayan community and Ladino and state power structures.

Outside of their community, Comiteca women were largely voiceless. None had any education nor could they speak Spanish, the language of the outside world. They were active as craft and agricultural producers and vendors; however, their interactions with outsiders were limited to market contexts. In the early twentieth century, Comiteca women were not yet part of the wage labour force as domestic servants for Ladino households.

The few Ladino men resident in Comitancillo in this period were in a privileged position. They were acquiring land, and establishing the first businesses; and were rapidly becoming the key links between the community and the national structures. They held numerous offices as representatives of the state, such as military commissioner, health officer, and municipal secretary.

The majority of Ladina women who ventured into Comitancillo came as wives and mothers, but they were also very active economically and socially. They were teachers and businesswomen. The municipal records of both Comitancillo and the neighbouring municipality of Tejutla indicate that the majority of the government authorized liquor outlets were operated by Ladina women. They also opened bakeries and shops that sold household staples. They also appear to have been the driving force behind the development of more orthodox Catholic celebrations of significant religious occasions; constituting the majority of the members of the organizing committees for the processions and masses to honor the patron saints of the town.

13. Community Justice System: A Recourse for Women

Throughout previous sections of this chapter, cases from the Justice of the Peace office in the municipal archives of Comitancillo have been cited to provide information about the lives of women in this period. The archives contain documented cases beginning in 1900 of complaints that went before the local justices of the peace, usually Mam elders, and records of the convictions and punishments. Until 1922, the *alcalde* acted as the judge; after that date there was a tribunal consisting of three Mam authorities, a prominent Ladino resident, and the secretary of the municipality. Cases were either brought before the tribunal by the plaintiff directly or by the *auxiliar* (the *aldea* representative). Almost complete records were available for the Comitancillo tribunal for 1921 to 1968. Examination of a systematic sample of 114 cases from this 47-year period provides insight into women's lives.[9]

The code of conduct enforced within the tribunal is overtly based on the codified legislation of the national Guatemalan legal system, the Common Criminal Code; however, in many ways it is a Mam code of conduct that is being maintained within a framework the state laws. The Mam code of conduct is particularly evident in the standards of household relations and respect for personal property enforced by the tribunal. Punishments are either immediate fines or jail time. The municipality has a small adobe building attached to it that serves as a jail, with a wooden grate covering the door.

Serious criminal charges, such as homicide have always been referred to the higher court in San Marcos, the department capital; included in the cases referred to San Marcos are any physical abuse cases that resulted in injuries requiring more than eight days to cure. The local Comitancillo tribunal resolved all minor conflicts and law violations. The cases in the sample can be roughly categorized into three main types: disrespect and abuse issues within the family (50%); public fighting, drunkenness, and disturbances (30%); and violations of property and municipal bylaws (20%).

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[9] A selective sample of 114 cases from this 47-year period was used for analysis. A case on the 15th of February, the 15th of June, and the 15th of November from each year was selected. If more than one case appeared on that date, a case involving at least one woman was chosen. Some of the record books were missing; therefore there are not a full three cases for each of the 47 years, or a total of 141.

The largest category concerns family conflict; and within this category, the majority (60%) are cases in which women accuse their husbands of disrespect, and verbal and physical abuse. An example of one of the more straightforward cases of an abusive husband is included here to illustrate the basic legal process and the documentation format. In this case, Nicolasa Agustín denounces abuse by her husband, Pedro Berduo, and when the members of the tribunal have confirmed the abuse, Pedro is punished with time in the local jail cell or a cash fine.

> First Court, municipality, Santa Cruz, Comitancillo, fifth of April of nineteen hundred and twenty-one.
>
> Because: on this date, and at the time of nine in the morning Nicolasa Agustín presented herself here, denouncing that in these moments she had been abused by her husband, Pedro Berduo, that the order [was given] to investigate and hear the accused. The accused declared that it was true that he had directed abuse at his woman, but from today on he would proceed to observe good conduct. The existence [of abuse] was confirmed by the confession of the accused, and since the abuses constitute a crime as comprehended in the Title III of the Criminal Code,
> Therefore: this court, fulfilling Articles 454 and 46 of the legal code cited here, informs the accused Pedro Berduo, of the penalty of 10 days in jail, convertible in its totality to the sum of 30 pesos in national money.
> Notified: [signatures] Manuel Matías, Antonio Ramírez, Bernabe Salvador

In eight of the thirty cases involving abusive husbands, both verbal and physical abuse is mentioned; in 14 of the thirty cases it is unclear if the abuse is strictly verbal or also includes physical abuse; in the final eight cases, both the husband and the wife are involved in the fighting. Ironically, in cases where both the husband and wife are fighting, they are often both given jail sentences together.

While there is a definite social and productive hierarchy within the household, all members can expect to be treated with a certain amount of respect, and all members can appeal to the Justice of the Peace if they feel they have not received the respect they deserve. The following are examples of cases concerning disrespect between family members.

- June 16 1923 – María Matías Gomez reported that her son-in-law insulted her with offensive words at eleven in the morning
- Feb 17 1928 – José Tomás Ambrocio reported that his son and his son's wife did not show him the respect he deserved

- Feb 16 1929 – Emilio Crisostomo and his wife accuse Emilio's brother and his wife of insulting them within the household, in the end all four were fined for improper conduct
- June 12 1929 – Paula Isidro accuses her sister and brother-in-law of insulting her with offensive words without provocation
- Nov 16 1935 – José Ramirez reports the disrespect of his son: "that yesterday when he [José] called his son to attention regarding his work, his son responded with profane words" and the son responds that in a moment of anger he mistreated his father, and that he recognizes this fault
- June 15 1965 – José Dionicio Morales reports that his 19-year old son treated him with a lack of respect when the son was drunk.

As discussed earlier, public drunkenness and disruptive behaviour, as well as general disrespect between community members account for 30% (34/114) of the cases arbitrated by the Justice of the Peace in this period. Most of these cases (22/34) concerned drunk men who got into fights. The remainder consisted of five cases concerned women fighting, and seven cases of disrespect between non-related residents.

The third category of cases is violation of personal property and municipal bylaws. Conflicts over property boundaries, firewood and water access and consumption, and the ownership and straying of animals were common (12 cases). Bylaw violations include such things as the sale of meat at a higher price than permitted (February 17 1943); urinating in public (February 12 1944); and improper care of the cemetery (November 2 1928). Stealing was relatively rare, appearing only twice in this sample; however, it was a very serious violation in the community and severely punished. For example, Manuel López was found guilty of stealing a towel belonging to Manuel Miranda on June 15 1951; and sentenced to ten days in jail, a sentence comparable to those for physical abuse. Even more severe, Guillermo Salvador received a sentence of one month in jail on November 17 1958, for stealing six eggs, four pounds of beans, and 20 cents cash, as well as threatening the young woman of the household with a knife.

14. Recurrent Themes

14.1. "*Antes habia respeto*" - Respect

As is common in indigenous communities worldwide, "respect" is a predominant concept in making meaning and understanding change. In the interviews, the women mainly used the word "respect" to refer to following appropriate behaviour towards others, particularly elders, and following customary practices during the cycles of life. Respect also refers to the value given to each person and to the natural world. The older women all commented on the current loss of "respect" of the elderly, referring to the failure of people to do things in the proper traditional way and to follow the advice of the elders.

14.2. Social Isolation

The narratives suggest that women have few relationships of close confidence and solidarity, and experienced a significant sense of social isolation. Only a few of the women in this sample appear to have had close relationships of trust with their husbands. The majority seem to have fairly hierarchical and interdependent relationships with their spouses, although these relationships seemed to mellow in old age. Women's relationships with other men in the household are equally deferential and distant. A woman's father may have been affectionate during her childhood, but ultimately he is responsible for her productivity and protection. Her father-in-law is also an authority figure, without the affection to soften it. Relationships with brothers, uncles, and other male relatives may be friendly; however, ultimately, the disparate gender roles and status produce a distance. Interactions with male non-relatives outside the household are formal and limited.

In terms of female relationships, the maternal relationships with one's mother, and later one's children, are intimate and close. Relationships with other female relatives such as sisters, cousins, and aunts appear to be largely friendly. The structure of the household after marriage creates more competing agendas rather than solidarity between women and their mothers-in-law, and sisters-in-law. After marriage, women also had drastically reduced opportunities to interact with their female relatives from their family of origin. Friendships with women outside the household and extended family appear to be rare, as women's oppressive daily routines and limited movements within the community prevent the development of many close friendships.

15. Summary

The life narratives of Comiteca women born in the first half of the twentieth century reveal that within a largely predetermined peasant life pattern. As girls, they had few choices: they were expected to obey their elders and work full time within the family subsistence economy. There was little opportunity for play, although sheep herding was largely unsupervised work; they had no formal education; rarely were they allowed to leave their immediate community to attend the market or a fiesta. The most important choice a woman made in her life was the selection of a husband. The character of the man and the condition of the patrilocal household largely determined the quality of her life after marriage. If problems arose in their marriage relationship or in the patrilocal household, they could count on support from their family of origin if they had married following traditional procedure with parental approval. In this sense, adhering to traditional practice was insurance for future support and protection.

Women's economic lives were largely prescribed within the gender-based division of labour within a subsistence economy; that is, women were responsible for domestic functions, small animal husbandry, and assistance with crop production. Craft production was potentially an area of individual influence and agency for women. Women who had the opportunity and inclination to learn to weave, make pottery, or produce other homemade goods were able to contribute financially to the household, and thus gained importance and possibly influence within the family. Craft production, small animal husbandry, and selling in the local market were the only sources of cash open to these women, although most often all income was transferred to the male household head for management.

Women inherited land from their parents, although usually less than male offspring. Owning land invested the women with some recognition within the household; and although their husbands usually managed the cultivation of the land on a daily basis, the women controlled the use and destiny of the land they had inherited.

Women experienced the least freedom during the early years of marriage and their reproductive years, when paternity and control of sexuality were critical, reproductive responsibilities were the most confining, and they were at the bottom of the household hierarchy within their husband's family. Older women had greater freedom and independence of movement and activity, and more control of household resources as they became the senior women within the household.

Despite the fact that women born in the first half of the twentieth century had very few choices in the basic life path they lived, it is evident from the narratives that within the limited parameters of their predetermined life paths, women possessed pockets of authority, spaces for individual agency, and, at several times in their lives, they could make life-shaping choices.

Chapter Five

The Mothers: Diversification within a Predetermined Life Path

Berta's Story

Berta was born in 1963, in the *aldea* located thirty-minutes walk from the town centre. She now lives in a neighbouring *aldea*, with her husband and six children. Their home consists of a small adobe cooking-house with an open fire among the traditional three large stones for cooking, a low table with a *metate* (grinding stone) for hand grinding corn, and an assortment of clay and plastic cooking utensils kept in a simple wooden cupboard. The other house across the patio is somewhat larger, but also of adobe with a tile roof. The one-room house is quite dark inside because of the small windows. There are two large wooden platform beds with numerous blankets, and clothing is hung from ropes strung from the rafters. As Berta and her husband have several home-based productive activities, this room also holds the candle-making equipment, the stock for her vending business, and the sewing machine she has been able to purchase. The majority of life is lived outside in the patio, except for heavy rains, when people sit under the porch or around the fire in the kitchen at meals and in the evenings.

"My deceased father was an itinerant merchant; he always went to sell in El Rodeo, a town on the coastal plain. He took things from here to sell on the coast, and brought back fish, peanuts and other things. He did not walk to the coast, but went in trucks. We as children just stayed at home with my mother. When I was a girl I took care of the small shop that my parents had in our house, and sometimes helped my mother to work in the kitchen and with other work. We were eleven children in all, but five siblings have died, so there are just myself and five others left. I am the only woman, growing up with five brothers. I never went to work on the *finca.*

"We didn't have any religion, because before there was not religion like there is now. We had ceremonies that the Mayan priests did in people's homes and on the hilltops. They performed ceremonies when someone was sick or for whatever happened in someone's life, and also about the cycles of nature. My parents practiced Mayan ceremonies, and many people came to them for cures of illness and whatever family problem they had. When I was growing up there were three other Mayan priests, plus my parents who practiced in our *aldea*. I was with them when they did the ceremonies in the house, and sometimes I even helped burn the *pom* [incense made from tree resin]. ...But when the Catholic religion arrived many people were inclined to that religion, and didn't go to the Mayan priests anymore.

"I only went to school for two years, because at that time my father died. I was only twelve years old when we were left orphans, and I did not continue studying. My father died in a vehicle accident when the truck he was in went over a cliff. At the time there were four of us children in school; but my mother could no longer cover the expenses in the household, let alone in the school, so I had to quit school when I had only reached grade two.

"I met my future husband here in the *aldea.* I was 18 years old when we married. After we married we lived for two years in his parents' house. Then we moved to this house in Ixmoco where we have lived for 20 years. We have seven *cuerdas* of land, some of which has *milpa* and some is forested slope.

"I had eight children, but two died as infants. I gave birth to my children at home, sometimes by myself and sometimes with the help of the midwife from the community. My oldest child is Lorena; she is 20 years old.

"We cultivate *milpa,* and I have chickens. I used to have some pigs, but I sold them. When we were first married, my husband just worked the land and always went to the *finca.* But now he makes candles, with the training I got from AMMID...I also have a small business selling snacks to the school children. I am part of the group that embroiders *huipiles* and I earn money from those as well.

"We don't go to the *finca* any more because my children are studying, and if we go then they have to come with us, and then they would fail their grades in school. So for this reason we decided not to go to the *finca,* for the good of our children. Furthermore, we now have some work so that we can survive as a family here. For example, now I have a market where I can sell my embroidered blouses, and so although we don't have a lot, we have enough.

"Only four of my children are studying now; a daughter in seventh grade, a son in fifth, and two girls in first grade. Our objective as parents is to give each child an education so that in the future they can cope with any difficulty that they confront in life. We also want them to study because we do not have enough land to give each child a good-sized inheritance. So we decided that it is best to struggle today so that the children can graduate and have a better future. I hope that my children put effort into their studies because it is worth a lot, and no one can take it away from them, on the other hand, if we give them land as inheritance, they can easily sell it. For this reason we are not buying land with the little money we are earning, but rather we are investing it in the education of our children. Now if they do not want to study, it is not our problem.

"That's what happened with Lorena. She was in eighth grade when she became pregnant, and the ungrateful man did not recognize the baby. My husband was very angry when he found out. At the time I also had a baby, so I could not take care of both babies, and she had to quit school. The father of the baby never recognized the baby, even though Lorena struggled in San Marcos and in Comitancillo. The man said that the baby is not his, and that he doesn't know Lorena, and therefore we can't claim anything from him. Lorena works part-time housecleaning in town. Her sister has started weaving *fajas* on the backstrap loom to earn some money.

"What makes me happy in life is that I can do machine embroidery and now have a market to sell blouses every week. I am also happy that I have my small sale of snacks with the students, and return home with a little money every day.

"What makes me sad is the death of my baby recently. Before when he was alive, in truth I was very happy because he was a boy. I only have one other boy; all the rest are girls.

1. Introduction

While the life pattern of the "grandmothers," Comiteca women born in the first half of the twentieth century, resembles a single, predetermined path with a few pockets of power, and a modest amount of space for individual choices and agency, the lives of the next generation of women, those born between 1950 and 1970, who are "middle-aged" today (30-50 years old), show a somewhat broader range of alternatives and possibilities within the same fairly standard life pattern. External impacts on these women's lives include national socio-political events, particularly the internal armed conflict that overshadowed the 1970s and 1980s, growing technological change, and increased integration into the national education, communication, and government systems. At the same time as these external developments triggered a process of internal change, women adapted to change in ways based on collective cultural patterns and individual opportunities and abilities.

The lives of the 20 women interviewed within this cohort are similar to the older women in that their lives revolve around the daily and yearly agricultural cycle, and the most significant life change occurs at marriage. Formal education and literacy continue to be out of reach of the majority of women. The most significant changes in the pattern occur in the modification and expansion of traditional production endeavours and in the diversification in family composition and reproductive patterns. This chapter will explore the dimensions of these women's lives as they differ and conform to the pattern of the older generation in the two main arenas: productive work and marriage/reproductive experience.

2. Education

2.1. Shifting Perceptions about Educating Girls

Formal education and literacy continued to be out of reach of the women born in the decades between 1950 and 1970. The women in this group have an average of one year of formal education, as compared to the women from the previous generation who had none at all. The range of formal education achieved by the women in the middle-aged cohort is from none (seven women) to six years (one woman).

The suspicious attitude towards the purpose and usefulness of formal education that existed in the first half of the century continued to be held in some households between 1950 and 1980, as is clear in the comments of Alicia and Domitila below. In fact, Alicia's description of hiding from the school officials coming to register students is identical to the recollections of girls in the first part of the century:

> I never went to school because when I was a girl, there were no schools in the *aldeas* or *caserios*; there was only a school in town. My deceased parents said to me, "You won't go to school because the people that come to register children are thieves, they just want to take the children; better that you go hide in the *tapanco* (water container) or in the *chuj* (steambath hut) so that they won't see you." And that's what we did. – Alicia, 46

> I only had two years of school. I didn't continue because my father did not give me the opportunity. He always said to me, " You don't have to study any more because you are a woman, and education won't be useful to you." I wanted to continue studying; only it wasn't possible. – Domitila, 33

Despite the persistence of a negative perception of formal education in some households, by the middle decades of the century many Comitecos were beginning to see some value in education, and particularly in basic Spanish language ability. Increasing contact with the outside world via the first almost-all-weather road finished in 1942, female and child involvement in plantation labour, and growing regional markets contributed to the recognition that basic fluency and literacy in Spanish was advantageous. However, despite slowly changing attitudes, the need for children's labour within the household prevented the majority of children in this period from obtaining much education.

> I never went to school. There was a school [in this community] at the time, but my father did not give me the opportunity to study because at the time I was committed to just pasturing the sheep. –Catarina, 45
>
> I never went to school because my deceased father did not give me the opportunity to study. Although he went to register me in the school, later he did not give me permission to go to classes because at that time my mother died, and I had to make the food for my father and wash his clothes. So for this reason I didn't study. The same happened when I was living with my brother. He always said to me, "You cannot go to school because you have to go collect firewood. If you don't do this work, I will not give you food." So what could I do? – Cecilia, 40
>
> I never had the opportunity to study. My mother said that I couldn't study because she needed help with the work in the house, so I had to obey her. –Camila, 40
>
> I wanted to study very much, but my father said no because he did not have the economic resources to give us more education. –Dominga, 33

Often parents gave a predetermined number of years of education to each child, and frequently there was also a gender differential. The usefulness of basic literacy and numeracy skills was more apparent for boys than for girls. While basic school attendance was free, parents had to pay for all the school supplies, special activities, and often uniforms, consisting of a sweater and standard pants or *corte.* The cash required for in the education process was another barrier to greater participation.

> I finished four years of school; and then when I was twelve years old, I left school and we always went to the *finca*...My brother got sixth grade. They [my parents] said that because he was a man they gave him that. Only four years for the girls. I only had four years in school...maybe it was because I was the oldest daughter, and they didn't give me permission to go out and work. They only gave me money for school. Then my mother said there was not more money to continue going to school. We didn't even have enough for the household expenses, let alone for school. So fine, what could I do? ...My parents said: up to there, and no more. Okay, I respect that. –Ana María, 33

Another major barrier to educational achievement among Comiteco children was that the emerging national school system had exclusively Spanish-speaking teachers and programs. Growing up in a totally Mam environment, children were confronted by Spanish for the first time when they arrived in school. In addition, the rigid teaching methods of the Ladino teachers were in sharp contrast to the indirect observation and "learning by doing" that Comiteco children experienced in their homes.

> Sometimes I went to weed the *milpa* because my mother said that it is one's work to learn. Then later one has the knowledge to work alone. We always went to learn everything. For example, what I am doing now is that I go with my son to clean the *milpa* and the beans when there are weeds. My son and I always go together, sometimes to collect firewood. Even though it is not much, but it is something to teach him as a boy how to tie and carry wood. That is what they taught me. –Ana María 33

In contrast, Angelica's negative experience in the school system illustrates the language and learning barriers confronting Mam children in a culturally and socially foreign school system:

> I only went to school for one year here in town, because there was no school in our *aldea* before. I didn't want to study more. My parents wanted me to continue studying but the teachers were cruel sometimes. Maybe that's why I was afraid, how they hit us! ...The teachers treated the students harshly. We trembled. They only spoke Spanish. On the other hand, we all spoke Mam. Maybe the language was a problem too, because I couldn't understand anything. It would have been good it they could have explained in Mam a little bit. Before going to school, one didn't hear any Spanish. Where would you? Because of fear I did not want to return, and because I didn't understand anything they said to me. When I arrived they beat me in the school. Oh, how our hands hurt from the rulers [they hit us with]! They had very thin rulers, not wide ones. "Put your fingers here," they said, and then they hit, and if not [on the hands, then] on the bottom. –Angelica, 43

In a few cases, women admitted that their parents encouraged them to study; but that they did not see the value of continuing to go to school at the time, and often regretted the decision later in life.

> I studied five years in the school here in our *aldea*...It's not my father's fault [that I didn't continue]. Perhaps it's my own fault. I can't say that it was my parents' fault. They were struggling so that I could go to school, but I didn't want to any more. Maybe I was lazy. I didn't like to go to school. – Corina, 42

> I only studied one year in the first grade of Primary school. When I was little I did not care about school. I thought that it was not worth anything, but now I regret very much that I didn't study. I can't read and write. My parents encouraged me, but I didn't want to study. Rather I looked for a man at that age, and that's what happened. [She married at 14 years of age]. My parents told me to study, but I was stubborn and looked for a man. – Carmen, 30

Today, formal education is highly valued by all of the women in this age group. They feel that their own lives would have been different if they had been able to go to school, and they feel strongly that the future well being of their children lies in obtaining a good education.

> I have learned a few words in Spanish, but just by listening to other people talk... Now I regret that I didn't have more opportunity to study, because if I had studied my life would be different. I don't want my sons and daughters to be left without an education like me. So we as parents are struggling so that our children get an education. Thanks to God, five of my children have earned their grade six diplomas. I think with this grade one can defend one's self in any life circumstances. Not like me, I can't even read, much less write. – Catarina, 45

> If I had studied, I would have a job with a salary, but since I didn't study, I don't know anything; I am just passing the days in my house. –Cecilia, 40

> My brothers went to school, but I didn't... I think that they didn't think it important for a woman to study, because before there was a lot of discrimination against women. But now I am seeing that all the boys and girls are studying; that they all have the same opportunity, while before they didn't. Oh, how I regret that I didn't even study one year! – Camila, 40

Many of the women have participated in adult literacy and basic education classes, and the one woman with a grade six education, Aida, is a literacy instructor. Spanish literacy continues to be a challenge for the women because they do not have a sound knowledge of spoken Spanish, since they speak Mam exclusively in their daily lives. Notably only six of the 20 women did their interviews in Spanish, and the remainder used interpreters in their interviews. While almost all can communicate basically in Spanish when needed, they are much more comfortable expressing themselves in Mam. Unfortunately, Spanish is the language used for basic literacy because Spanish remains the national language of the State, and because Mam has become a written language only in the last three decades, there are few written texts in Mam.

The decreasing amount of land available for farming is also moving parents to place more value in formal education; for some, like Berta at the beginning of this chapter, and Camila quoted below, it is the only future security and inheritance they can offer their children.

> We as parents have decided to give our children education so that they can progress in the future, since a person without education like us does not know where we are going. Another thing is that education for each of my children will be their inheritance because we have no land to divide for each of them. Now if one of them does not want to study, then it isn't our problem. – Camila, 40

When parents cannot offer land or education to their children, they feel that the future is insecure, not only for the children but also for themselves, as they depend on the support of their adult children in their old age. Alba and her husband have very little land; and despite his wage labour in construction, and her array of income-generating activities (embroidery, candle-making, chickens, baking bread, selling snacks in the market), they struggle to provide for their children's basic needs. She expresses her pessimism about the future for herself and her family:

> I don't know what I will do for my children because we have almost nothing. We have thought about it. We don't have money to give them education or to buy land. I believe that only God is with them. Who knows how they will live...Alba, 32

The middle-aged women in this cohort also view education as strategically important for their daughters' futures. Women in the older generation made reference to the fact that marrying later enabled a young wife to defend herself better in her husband's household. The added maturity and skills that came with age allow the young woman to perform her responsibilities with confidence, and not to be as intimidated by her new husband and parents-in-law. Middle-aged women also think that a higher level of education improves a young wife's position within the new household. Both Dominga and Carmen believe that with an education, their daughters will have greater equity and strength in their future marriage and family relationships.

> It makes me sad for my daughters that they will end up like me, because many men treat women badly and there are men that leave their women abandoned with a good number of children, so for that reason I am worried for the lives of my daughters that they will have a life like that. ...I tell them that there are parents-in-law that treat their daughters-in-law badly, and husbands that do too, so what can you do? In the case of women that know nothing, it is better to have some education so that she can defend herself when faced with all the obstacles in life. – Dominga, 33, single mother

> I always encourage my daughters to study...I always tell them that they will not fail like I did because everything has consequences such as I am living today. If I would have studied, then my life would have been different, ...I think that if I would have had an education my husband wouldn't have left me. The other woman is a teacher. – Carmen, 30

2.2. The Impact of School Attendance on the Household Economy

The shift to increased school attendance among children has an immediate impact on the household economy, particularly the distribution of labour. This affects the workload of the women and men in the household. As one woman describes it:

> All people need someone to help them in their area of work: the man needs sons, in the same way as the woman needs daughters. – Catarina, 45

As in the previous generation, one of the primary reasons for not sending children to school was because their labour was critical to the household economy. The women in the middle generation fail to benefit from either of these social patterns: as children they did not attend school because their labour was needed in the household; and now as adults they have less child labour available to them, because their children are attending school. Women in the reproductive years are particularly affected by this loss of child labour contributions. While older children are in school they can no longer care for the younger children, so their mothers are restricted to tasks they can do with one child on their backs and other toddlers at their skirts.

School-aged children do continue to participate in the work of the household before and after school (school hours are from 8 a.m. to 1 p.m. for primary school, and 2 p.m. to 7 p.m. for secondary school). Often children grind maize or take *nixtamal* (cooked maize) to the *molino* (grinding mill), feed animals, collect firewood, carry water, or hoe the fields. However, the total amount of labour hours they can allocate to household work is significantly reduced by school attendance and associated assignments and activities.

It appears that women's work is more impacted than men's work by the removal of children from the household labour force for a large part of the day. Men's work is more irregular and intensive for short periods. Thus during periods of particularly intense work, such as planting, hoeing, or harvesting, the boys will help their fathers before and after school and on weekends; and they may even be withdrawn from classes for several days. A woman's work is more constant and less flexible. The daily needs of food, fire, and water for the family and the animals are relentless and indispensable; and without the assistance of girls in the household for these daily tasks, middle-aged women must reduce time spent on non-essential activities such as weaving or pottery. Craft production is often only resumed when a woman is older and her children are more independent.

The overall household survival strategy is also altered by the new concern that children complete as much schooling as possible. As Berta pointed out in the narrative at the beginning of the chapter, in order to enable their children to complete their grades at school, the family can no longer migrate to the *finca* to work. Harvest on the *fincas,* the period when most labourers are required, is from October to February; and this period requires children to miss several months of school, as the academic year is from January to November. Families must access and develop alternative income-generation sources in the home community, if parents are to be able to finance their household and children's educational needs. In other families (e.g., Camila, Cecilia, Domitila, Fidelia) only the husband migrates to the *finca* to work, while the wife stays with her children at home. This again decreases the amount of income from *finca* labour, as there are no longer the earnings of the children and wife from *finca* contracts; and increases the woman's responsibilities managing the household and farm by herself in the absence of her husband.

At the same time, the *finca* can provide larger amounts of money needed for specific educational endeavours. Many parents and students go for one or two months over the school break to earn money (e.g., Dominga, Ana María). For example, Angelica and her sons went to the *finca* to earn money for the extra academic and graduation expenses for her oldest son's grade twelve year.

Sometimes parents delay putting their children into school, especially the girls, so that they can care for younger siblings; however, if entry is delayed too long, girls become embarrassed because they are so much older than other students, and they often drop out in a few years.

> I was ten years old when I went to school. I was big when I started, because my mother said there was not enough money to enter me in school earlier and she needed me at home. But I got up to help to wash the *nixtamal* to take to the grinding mill and return to make the tortillas to eat [in the mornings]. Then I went to school. When I finished classes, I came home to eat lunch and did my homework assignments. Then I went to help my mother to gather hay for the pigs, sometimes to weed the *milpa* ...I only went to school for four years. -Ana María, 33

3. Women, Land, and Residency

Despite diversification of productive activities into more craft production, commercial agriculture, and wage labour in the second half of the century, Comiteca society continued to have a consistent *milpa* agriculture core that provided a least some of the subsistence needs and much of the sense of identity and security for the inhabitants. Ideally each person inherits at least some land that serves as an economic base (however small), a place to build a house, and a manifestation of one's community membership.

3.1. Changing Land Tenure Patterns

The continued division of land among all the children of the family has resulted in diminishing plot sizes, and farms are becoming increasingly unable to produce enough of the staple crops to sustain a household.[1] In the early decades of the twentieth century, land holdings of 100-300 *cuerdas* were common, according to the land titles documents held in the municipal archives, and recollections of elderly residents.[2] By the middle of the century, the diminishing size of the landholdings was evident. In the 1960s, the minimum land holdings in Comitancillo were 2-15 *cuerdas* and the largest were 60-80 *cuerdas* per household, with an estimated average of 40 *cuerdas* (Feliciano 1996:89). By the mid-1980s, the average landholding was 10-20 *cuerdas*, and 53% of households owned ten *cuerdas* or less (Feliciano 1996:89).

Today, the average landholding per household is less than ten *cuerdas*. Within the municipality, land holding sizes vary according to distance from the main town centre and altitude. Holdings in the higher-altitude, less-fertile *aldeas* are much larger (10-40 *cuerdas*), while landholdings in the valley, which is more fertile and more densely populated, are much smaller (averaging 3-10 *cuerdas*).

The shift from corporate to private land tenure and the associated economic changes that occurred during the twentieth century influenced how land was conceived and managed. Increasingly, land was not only a communal resource for human subsistence that was accessed and used according to need, but also a privately owned commodity with a monetary value. For example, it is only in the last few decades that families have rented land in Comitancillo. Camila's family owns only three *cuerdas* of land, not enough to sustain a family, so they rent land in order to meet their household needs.

> We do not have sufficient land to plant our *milpa*, so we just have to rent some *cuerdas* of land from other people in order to harvest enough maize. We pay Q50 for each *cuerda* per year. Now we are cultivating 7.5 *cuerdas*, because we are renting five *cuerdas*, and 2.5 more *cuerdas* are my husband's inheritance. He has three *cuerdas* inheritance but we constructed our house on one-half *cuerda*. Camila, 40

The fact that some families must rent land to meet their needs is also indicative of the growing disparity in landownership within the municipality. As mentioned in the previous chapter, several Ladino families moved into the community in the first decades of the century and took advantage of the introduction of private land tenure to accumulate large extensions of land.[3] In addition, some of the Mayan families acquired title to larger landholdings than others during the first half of the century. For example, in the *aldea* where Camila's family rents land, the family with the largest landholdings has long been linked with the work of recruiting labourers for the *fincas,* has held community government positions, and initiated truck and bus transportation in the Municipality. As a result, the emergence of significant social and economic stratification within the community was evident by the mid-twentieth century.

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[1] In the cursory review of the archival data and in my conversations with elderly women, I found no evidence that residents of Comitancillo participated in the movements for land redistribution during the 1950s or in efforts to colonize previously unpopulated land in the 1950s-1970s (Handy 1984:213-222), however, further research is required to confirm this lack of participation.

[2] One *cuerda* is equal to an area of approximately 25 X 25 metres, or 0.03 hectares.

3.2. Women's Aspirations and Access to Land

Land inheritance patterns for women in the middle age group continue to reflect the gender bias evident in the early part of the century, as well as the mounting land shortage.

> I have some land of my own, but it is not much. The house belongs to my husband. I have an inheritance from my parents, but it is only one *cuerda*. It is close by. We plant wheat there. Recently my father identified the land that was to be mine. But the land title has not been done yet. The daughters received less, and the sons a little more. [He gave] only 1.5 *cuerdas* each to the women, and about five or six *cuerdas* to each of the men. I don't know what I will do for my children because now we have almost nothing. We have thought about it. We don't have money to give them education or to buy land. I believe that only God is with them. Who knows how they will live. It is difficult. - Alba, 32

The reasoning for continuing to bequeath less land to daughters than to sons remains the same; women are expected to be cared for by and to be responsible to their husbands, and thus they do not need land of their own.

> I received three *cuerdas* of land as inheritance. I think [my father] gave more to my brothers...He was going to give another *cuerda* more to each of the sons, and less to the daughters. My father said this was because women do not have the ability to care for the land. They need help to care for it. That was his idea: to give a little more to the men. - Aida, 39

> A while ago I received my inheritance, although only a little; my parents gave it to me. They gave inheritance to the ten children. I received 22 *cuerdas* of land, because my father had a lot of land, maybe he had 300 *cuerdas* of land. My brothers received 40 *cuerdas* each as their inheritance. - Catarina, 45

Unfortunately, the perception that women will be cared for in material terms within a patriarchal household and therefore do not need land of their own is increasingly invalid. There are a growing number of women in this middle-aged bracket that live outside the security of a traditional marriage relationship; there are more unmarried mothers, more separations, and fewer women who remarry after separation from or death of a spouse in this generation than in the previous one.

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[3] For example, the Reyna family still owns over 300 *cuerdas* of land adjacent to the town centre, while the average Comiteco family has less than 15 *cuerdas,* less than the amount needed to sustain a family.

Despite the continued persistence of gender-biased land divisions within families, there are, however, a few cases in which parents divide the land equally:

> My father gave all of us an equal number of years of schooling (four years), thus he did not discriminate against us as women. The same with our inheritance, he gave three *cuerdas* to each of us: three *cuerdas* to the men and three *cuerdas* to the women. - Dominga, 33

In some cases, women who have the opportunity ensure that their daughters inherit land to provide them with future subsistence and security. This pattern is illustrated by the unusual case of Dora, 35, from a high-altitude *aldea* three hours' walk from the town centre. Her father died when she was two years old; and when her mother remarried, Dora and her sister went to live with their uncle, their mother's brother. Bringing children from a previous marriage into a second marriage is considered risky, because many women believe that the new father will not treat the stepchildren with fairness and affection. Frequently, when a woman remarries, the children of a previous marriage will remain in the household of their maternal grandparents or uncles. However, Dora's mother did not pool the land she and her deceased husband had purchased (18 *cuerdas*) with the holdings of her second husband; rather, she legally deeded the land to Dora and her sister when they were still small. Dora's mother also had an inheritance of land from her own mother, and this land she passed to the children of her second marriage.

> [The land I inherited from my mother] is in my name. Quite a while ago I made the document for the land, my husband has no rights to take away what belongs to me. For now, he does not say anything about my land; he only cares for it because every year we plant *milpa* there. In my case, I have no intention of selling the land, because it will serve as the inheritance for my children in the future. The piece of land is far away [five hours' walk away] because it is located in the community where I was born, near Sipacapa. - Dora, 35

Although women do inherit land, often the control remains in the hands of the men in the family. Cecilia's case exemplifies the potential risks in this lack of control over household resources; her husband was an alcoholic who died of poisoning six months before the interview because he drank a bottle of pesticide.

> We had 35 *cuerdas* of land, but now I have nothing. It was partly the inheritance of my husband, and partly my inheritance, but my deceased husband sold it all to one of my brothers. I don't know why I gave my land title to him [my husband] so that he sold the land

> left to me by my deceased parents. My father had a good amount of land; perhaps he had 80 *cuerdas*. But my brothers did not give me much land; they only gave me about four *cuerdas*, and they kept the good part of the land. They only gave four *cuerdas* to each [of the daughters]; well, some of the women only received two or three *cuerdas*. My deceased mother also had land, but one of her grandchildren ended up with the land; she had about twelve *cuerdas* of land, and now it belongs to her grandson. The problem was that my deceased brother had the land, and now his sons don't want to give it up. They say it belongs to them, so there is nothing we can do about it. - Cecilia, 40

In Apolonia's case, it was her brothers that appropriated their father's land, and left the sisters with nothing:

> My deceased father only had twelve *cuerdas*. Only my brothers ended up with that land, while we women did not receive any land. My deceased father had said that the land should be divided among all of us equally, but my brothers did not comply with this. Rather they kept it all, while we women received nothing. It would have been good if my deceased father had divided up the land before he died, but instead my brothers took advantage of us because we are women. - Apolonia, 39

As long as a woman is married and her husband has land, there is not an immediate need for her to own land separately. The family will live off the land of the male household head, and her children will inherit the land from their father. For women without spouses, the land ownership issue is more critical. Most of the women (5/8) who have chosen not to remarry after separation from or death of a spouse have had the good fortune of inheriting land in their own names (Angelica, Dominga, Andrea, Alicia, Aida).

For example, Andrea is a widow who is living independently with her five children. After the death of her husband, she lived for nine months with her parents-in-law; however, there were some tensions in the household.

> They [my parents-in-law] were happy to have their grandchildren with them; the only problem was that they were not in agreement that I go out to work with my children, and if we arrived home late, they would be mad at us. At that time I had no idea how to live alone with my children, but I had the opportunity to talk with Ana [a leader in the local women's craft group] and she told me to that it would be better to live in my own house and then I could work freely. – Andrea, 34

So Andrea made the unusual decision to live on her own with her children on the land and in the house where they had lived with her deceased husband.

> My husband received an inheritance of land [3 *cuerdas*], and that is exactly where we are living now. At the moment the land belongs to me. But when my children are grown it will belong to them. I am happy because my deceased spouse had made the land title for his inheritance before he died. I have that document kept safely. I don't think that my parents-in-law could easily remove us from this house. Another thing is that I have the right to possess this land that belonged to the deceased because we were legally married. - Andrea, 34

A new phenomenon emerging with this generation of women is the desire to purchase land if they have not had the good fortune of inheriting land. Landless women who are without a husband perceive land ownership, or perhaps more specifically, a plot of their own *milpa*, as the heart of long-term well-being, independence, and security. Few would contemplate supporting themselves on wage labour or craft production alone. An integral part of life within the Comiteco community, and highland Mayan culture in general, is the cultivation of *milpa* as the basis of minimal survival. Despite the reality that crop production is slowly diminishing as the predominant element in survival in monetary and physical terms, it is still the core of life, meaning, and security for the highland Maya. While women may be, by choice or circumstance, outside the traditional husband-wife configuration, the land continues to be the foundation of life.

In contrast to the security of married and unmarried women who own land, three of the women of the eight in the sample that are separated or widowed are struggling with the lack of a subsistence land base (Cecilia, Ana María, Carmen). Cecilia lost her land when her husband sold it during a drinking spree, as described above. Carmen and Ana María are both separated from their husbands, and are currently living with their children in their fathers' households. Unfortunately, these living arrangements provide only temporary security, and the women face uncertain futures.

In Carmen's case, she married at age 14, and she lived in the household of her parents-in-law for 13 years. She had only one year of formal schooling, in contrast to her husband who was a teacher, with a grade twelve education. Her husband has a teaching position in another municipality, and there he began a relationship with another woman. When the situation became unbearable three years ago, Carmen returned with four of her five children (the eldest daughter wanted to remain with her paternal grandparents) to the home of her parents. As always, a woman's only alternative to living in her husband's household is to return to her household of origin. However, this is not a permanent solution because, while her parents have a responsibility to care for their daughter and her children, this situation becomes unpredictable when the parents die, and usually a brother becomes the head of the household. Often a brother does not share the same sense of responsibility towards a sister as a father does towards a daughter. The predominant fear is that the brother will marry and that his new wife will not want the bother and responsibility of this additional family in the household. Thus, Carmen feels very vulnerable at present, with few options for future security.

> Now I am just passing the days with my parents. The truth is that my parents do not have sufficient land to divide between us, because we are twelve siblings in total; therefore this little bit of land will not be enough for all of us. So now I have absolutely nothing. I am very worried because when my parents die where will my children and I go? At the moment I can't think of anything to do. Even though I would like to buy a little piece of land, I don't have money, and it is very expensive. The same goes to be able to build a little house: it requires a lot of money. All together it is a difficult situation...I have another unmarried brother. I am afraid that he will find a woman, and then for sure we will be kicked out of the house. He is the youngest brother so he will stay with the house. - Carmen, 30

Like Carmen, Ana María and her two children live in her father's household and regard the future with uncertainty, but she has more hope than Carmen that she can secure land and build a house for herself and her children. In this case, it is interesting to note that it is Ana María's mother that is assisting her to secure land for herself and her sons.

> Later when my mother and father die, maybe the wife of my brother will not be good to me. I only have one brother, and for sure my father will pass the house to him. So, if his wife is not good to me, then I will have to leave the house. I am thinking that this might happen, one never knows. So I was thinking to collect a little money to build my own house. My mother will sell me one-half a *cuerda* of land on which to build a house. It's close by, just above our house...I am thinking of going to the *finca* this year and then to buy the *lamina* [metal roofing sheets], and to earn a little money to pay the tradesman to make the adobe [bricks]. Maybe make the adobe this year, and get the *lamina* next year. So, little by little, not all in one year...My older son will go to work with his uncle in the Capital city during the holidays [from school]. I will leave my younger son with my mother. Then I'll only go for a month [to the *finca*]. If the baby is happy with my mother, I will return again. – Ana María, 33

3.3. Unchanging Patrilocal Residency Practices

The pattern of patrilocal/virilocal residency continues to be predominant among the women of this generation as it was in the first half of the century. All of the women in the sample lived in the households of their parents-in-law for the first years of marriage until they could either build their own house as a couple or, in the case of the youngest son, they inherited the house upon the death of the parents-in-law. The length of time living in the patrilocal household ranged from five to 15 years, with an average of nine years. Later in this chapter, there will be a discussion of the common tensions that exist between patrilocal household members, especially among the daughters-in-laws, that serve as an incentive to establish an independent household.

Another incentive to establish a separate household is the wish to have greater control of one's own productivity. While living in the patrilocal household, labour and production are largely controlled by the male household head, the husband's father. Dora describes how it was in the early years of her married life:

> We lived with them for 15 years. Each time we went to the *finca* we always had to give over all the money to my parents-in-law, everything we earned on the *finca*, so that we ended up with no money. We had our own money only when we finally lived in our own house. Dora, 35

The case of Andrea, described above, the widow who lives independently with her five children, is another example of the control exercised by patriarchal household heads over the labour and resources of all household members. She made the unusual decision to live independent of her father-in-law because she did not want him to control her productive activities.

4. Economic Life

A summary of the various productive activities of the households of the women interviewed is outlined in Table 5. The middle-aged women in this sample remain within traditional productive activities of women in Comiteca society; they continue to assist with crop production, raise animals, weave, and do small-scale marketing. The differences between this age group and the previous one relate to the structure of the production unit, the scale of production, and the introduction of new forms of wage labour.

As mentioned above, agriculture remains the core of life in Comitancillo. Other income-generation activities have emerged, and are growing in importance; however, cultivation of the land and raising animals continues to be the underlying cushion in all the diverse economic strategies employed by households. Women continue to be largely responsible for the daily needs of the animals within the peasant agriculture activities of the household, and provide assistance and support during intense work periods within the *milpa* cycle. In general, this baseline of agricultural and animal work remains unchanged for both women and men. The following discussion will examine the key areas within the productive sector that changed during these women's lifetimes: the decline of sheep herding, the increase of cash crop production, the introduction of collective production, and new wage labour opportunities.

Table 5: Productive Activities – Middle-Aged Women (30–50 years old)

Name	Age	Yrs Educ	Dist.	Household Composition	Agriculture	Craft	Paid Work
Alicia	46	0	A	Divorced mother with three kids at home	*Milpa* -raises pigs & poultry	None	-midwife
Catarina	45	0	C	Lives with mother,	*Milpa*, poultry	None	
Angelica	43	1	A	Widowed mother of three children	*Milpa* -raises pigs (G)	Embroidery (G)	-Domestic labourer -market vendor *FINCA*
Corina	42	5	B	Husband & six children	*Milpa*, poultry, cash crop production	Weaving (G)	(husband – police)
Dolores	42	3	C	Single, lives with parents	*Milpa*, poultry	Weaving (G)	Community Extensionist
Camila	40	0	C	Lives with husband & four children	*Milpa*, poultry	None	
Fidelia	40	0	A	Husband & six children	*Milpa*, poultry	None	*FINCA*
Cecilia	40	0	C	Widowed mother of five children	*Milpa*, poultry	None	
Apolonia	39	1	B	Husband & six children	*Milpa*, poultry	None	*FINCA*
Aida	39	6	A	Widowed with eleven children	*Milpa*, poultry	Weaving (G)	-Literacy instructor (husband – teacher)
Alejandra	38	2	A	Husband & nine children	*Milpa*, poultry	-baking bread	Health promoter (husband – teacher)
Berta	37	2	A	Husband & six children	*Milpa*, poultry	-candles -embroidered blouses (G)	-Snack Vendor
Dora	35	0	C	Husband & seven children	*Milpa*, poultry		
Ana	34	4	B	Lives with husband & eight children	*Milpa*, poultry, cash crop production	-crocheting, weaving (G)	Community extension worker
Andrea	34	2	B	Widowed with five children	*Milpa*, poultry	-crocheted bags (G)	
Domitila	33	2	C	Lives with husband & seven children	*Milpa*, poultry	-weaving (G)	*FINCA*
Dominga	33	4	C	Single mother with five children	*Milpa*, animals, fruit	-weaving (G)	Health promoter
Ana María	33	2	A	Single mother with two chidren lives with father and sisters	-helps father with *Milpa*, poultry	-embroidery (G)	Occasionally to the *FINCA*
Alba	32	4	A	Married lives with husband, seven children, mother-in-law	*Milpa*, poultry Cash crop production	-baking bread -embroidery (G)	refreshment stand in Sunday market
Carmen	30	1	B	Husband abandoned, lives with parents and five children	-helps father with *Milpa*, no land of her own	None	*FINCA*

Distance: A=less than ½ hr. walk to town; B= about one hour walk to town; C= 2-3 hours walk to town

* G=group production

4.1. Decline of Sheep Herding

In the 1950 – 1970 period, pasturing sheep was still considered the responsibility of girls; however, the extent of sheep production in the municipality was significantly reduced from what it was in the earlier decades of the century. While almost all the older generation of women herded sheep when they were young, only three out of the 20 of the middle-aged women herded sheep as girls. The three middle-aged women who tended sheep when they were girls come from the higher altitude, less populated *aldeas*; and two of them did it after school hours.

> Well, when I was young I dedicated myself to just pasturing sheep, grinding food for the pigs, and I always helped my mother to do the work in the kitchen...I never went to the *finca* as a girl...I did not learn any art with which to earn a little money, rather I only pastured the sheep in the fields. - Catarina, 45
>
> We had sheep, so that after we returned from school I went to pasture them, while my younger brothers collected firewood. – Dominga, 33
>
> When I was a girl, when I left school I went to pasture the sheep. We had sheep, and there was much land at that time where one could graze sheep. We had some land in the neighbouring *aldea*, so I went to pasture the sheep there after school. – Corina, 42

During the middle decades of the century, sheep flocks declined rapidly due to dwindling pastureland and wool markets, and conversion of former lower altitude pastures to crop production to meet the subsistence needs of the growing population. This is one of the most dramatic differences in the lives of girls in the first half of the century and those growing up in the second half of the century. The lives of girls in the earlier period were dominated by the many hours they spent every day herding sheep, their extended periods of isolation from other people, their lack of freedom from daily herding responsibilities, and their critical role within the household economy as caretakers of perhaps its greatest assets.

Removal of this time-consuming and demanding responsibility from the lives of young girls had several significant impacts. Firstly, there was more opportunity, or at least there was one less obstacle, for young girls to attend school. It also meant that physically they were more confined to the immediate household. There was less opportunity for unsupervised encounters with other young people, as their household duties kept them close to home. Alternately, there was more potential for visits to the market, and attendance at community celebrations and events. Despite the high value of the animals they were caring for, girls' labour does not seem to have been highly valued. Thus it does not appear that status within the household was lowered by removal of sheep herding responsibilities; rather, girls continued to be viewed as integral and compliant members of the household labour force to be inserted wherever they were most needed.

4.2. The Expanding Cash Crop Sector

In addition to subsistence *milpa* cultivation, Comitecos have always produced, at least on a small scale, some agricultural goods for regional markets. Before the opening of the road in 1942, all goods were transported by foot, a 1.5 day walk to San Pedro, the nearest large market. Given the prominence of sheep-raising in the community in the early decades of the twentieth century, wool was one of the largest exports from the community.

With the opening of the road in 1942, products were transported by truck to regional markets. For example, there are references to Comitancillo lime and wool being sold in San Pedro in the 1940s (McBryde 1945: 62, 72). From the 1950s to the 1970s, agricultural production for the regional market was a small component in the local economy. Some surplus potatoes, wheat (a flour mill was established on a local creek in these years), avocados, and beans appear to have been sold to outside merchants in the Comitancillo market; or transported directly to the San Pedro market for sale. Berta's father was an itinerant merchant who sold goods from Comitancillo in the coastal communities during the 1950s and 1960s, and brought goods from the coast for sale in Comitancillo using truck transport.

However, the scale of Comitancillo commercial production was still quite minor; the majority of maize, beans (*habas*, broadbeans, and *frijoles negros*, black beans), and squash were consumed within the household; and any extras were sold in the local market. Comitancillo never had the history of large volume market-garden production of crops like onions, garlic, and tomatoes that has existed in lower altitude communities like Panajachel, Sololá, and Aquacatan for more than a century (McBryde 1945; Tax 1953).

Fruit is the significant exception to the largely internal consumption of agricultural produce in Comitancillo. Apples and peaches were introduced in the highlands of Guatemala early in the colonial period (McBryde 1945: 29). The sheltered, temperate valley of Comitancillo is an ideal climate for the cultivation of these temperate fruits. Unfortunately, the fruit produced is of very poor quality; the fruit trees are largely untended, and "gradual degeneration has probably been continuous since Colonial times, with seeds planted for generation after generation, and little if any new stock brought in" (McBryde 1945:29).

Comitancillo produces an abundance of this low-quality fruit with very little effort. While the market value of the fruit is low, it is an easy source of income for many Comitecos. Generally, the crop needs no attention at all until harvest time. At this time, the fruit is picked and transported to the local Sunday market by foot. There the fruit is sold to wholesalers who buy up all the fruit, and transport it to Guatemala City and other centres for processing as preserves. While prices paid for produce are very low,[4] many of the women (Dominga, Ana, Apolonia, Dolores, Andrea, Domitila) in this group depend on this "no-fuss" crop for some additional income.

> Now I have a few peach and apple trees that I can pick, and I always go to sell in the market to gain a little money for my expenses. - Dominga, 33

The middle-aged women of Comitancillo also experienced the entrance of larger scale cash crop production for commercial enterprises, and the associated adjustments to household economies and labour allocations. In the late1980s, export companies began to contract highland farmers to produce specific vegetable crops such as broccoli, cauliflower, and brussels sprouts. The companies provided the seed, fertilizers, and pesticides; and enforced strict production guidelines. Men make the contracts with the companies, and control the money earned; however, women's labour contributions are required to sustain the endeavour. Thus cash crop production involves a reallocation of labour within the household. Findings in other highland Mayan communities indicate that women often transfer significant labour time to a new male income-generating activity, with the greatest single source of variation being the availability of older daughters to perform the domestic labour that is normally the responsibility of the female head (Katz 1995: 327).

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[4] In 1992 peaches were sold to external buyers for around Q4.00 ($0.80 Canadian) per 100 peaches, and apples were sold for Q30.00 ($6.00 Canadian) for 100 pounds.

In Comitancillo this form of production became established only in a few select communities, particularly those with reliable water sources and easy transportation access (i.e., Los Bujes, Taltimiche, Molino Viejo, Tuichelupe/Las Cruzes). Participation in vegetable production for export is relatively low in the community; probably less than 5% of Comiteco households are involved in this type of economic contract. Three women in the middle-aged cohort come from households with some cash crop production.

> We have *milpa.* We cultivate about 20 *cuerdas.* This year we planted about ten *cuerdas* of *milpa,* and ten *cuerdas* of brussels sprouts. We are working with ALCOSA. It always earns something. Look, if you harvest 20 *quintales* (100 pound bags) per *cuerda* of brussels sprouts, it is a profit. Now they pay Q95 per 100 pounds. One always profits with this. It is planted in May and harvested in September. We have to hire paid workers, either if we plant *milpa* or brussels sprouts. My children are now bigger, and they work, fumigating, hoeing, harvesting, everything. – Corina, 42

While many women, like Corina, report good earnings from these ventures, there are some negative impacts on the household economy that the women identified. Firstly, land previously dedicated to *milpa* cultivation, subsistence crops that feed the household, is converted to cash crop production. Not only is the basic maize, beans, and squash harvest lost to the household, but all the associated goods as well, such as the corn leaves for wrapping tamales, the corn stalks for feeding the animals, etc. In Corina's case, the family has enough land to maintain a portion of *milpa* at all times as a backup in case the cash venture fails. Another risk is that the companies reserve the right to not purchase all produce if it is not up to their standards, leaving a farmer with a large quantity of vegetables to sell, and a large debt to the company for the original seeds and chemicals.

Cash income from the crop usually remains in the control of the male household head; thus the woman responsible for food preparation no longer has the household harvest to utilize, nor does she have the cash with which to purchase the needed foodstuffs. Thus crop commercialization can compromise the food security of the household, and women's ability to meet the family's reproductive needs.

4.3. The Introduction of Collective Production

Middle-aged women in Comitancillo experienced the introduction of collective production initiatives in the 1980s and 1990s; a process that altered the nature of some of their traditional household-based productive activities. Production units are no longer just household/family/kinship based, but connect interested women throughout the community. Five of the women are involved in textile weaving groups, three in embroidery groups, three in pig raising cooperatives, and several in other productive initiatives (candles, crocheting). While this sample may be slightly biased in that the majority of women were linked to this research project through the cooperative projects, it does illustrate a shift in production patterns. Before this type of collective organization, production outside the household/family unit rarely occurred.

In Comitancillo, four aldea-based groups of ten to twenty women have initiated collective textile weaving production. Through NGO funding they have purchased wooden footlooms, accessed training, and obtained startup capital to purchase materials. Each group has four to six looms; and the women alternate working on them, or a couple work on each loom. They sell the products together and share the profits according to the amount of labour each put in. The start-up costs for footloom weaving, more productive and profitable than backstrap weaving, are prohibitive for the women if they do not do it on a collective basis.

The women producing embroidered *huilpiles* are also doing so in groups of ten to twenty women with collectively purchased machines, training, and raw materials using NGO grants. In this case, the women take turns using the machines, and each works on her own blouses. The sewing machines (that can be operated with or without electricity) are even more expensive than the footlooms, and therefore shared purchase is necessary. Collectively they can also purchase raw materials at bulk rates; and produce large quantities for larger orders, such as school uniforms.

The pig-raising projects work in a similar fashion. Sponsored by local and outside NGOs, the women are provided with startup capital, training in improved animal husbandry techniques, and on-going technical support. Although the women raise their pigs in their own households, they attend training sessions together and have the advantage of bulk orders of feed and other products.

The social impacts of this shift in traditional productive activities can be profound (Lynd 2000). Women's geographical and social realms are expanded from the immediate physical household and the associated fields, with occasional forays into public places such as the weekly market and masses, to a network of women's homes and semi-public situations such as group meetings. This shift also diminishes women's reliance on the immediate family unit of the patriarchal household, as now they have stronger economic and social links with people outside the household. While the women continue to work in productive tasks traditionally assigned to women (textile production, small animal husbandry), there are changes in terms of marketing and, in some cases, the unit of production. These women's activities have moved from production for household consumption and a small amount for local market sales, to an attempt to produce on a larger scale for cash income in a capitalist economy.

4.4. Old and New Wage Labour Opportunities

Outside wage labour continues to be a vital part of the household economy in Comitancillo for the families of middle-aged women, but it has diversified considerably. The previous generation's wage labour was confined to migratory labour on *fincas* and public works projects; in this generation, there are more women and men firmly embedded in wage labour relationships on a continuous, not just seasonal, basis.

Finca labour contracts continue to provide a reliable source of income for Comitecos without other options. The Municipal Archives contains registries of *finca* contracts continuously from 1959 to 1980. This registry lists only the male household head who holds the contract; however, often some or all of the other family members contributed to fulfill the contracts. Acting for a particular *finca*, a recruiting agent, often a local person, contracted labourers for a given number of days (usually 30 or 60 *jornales)*. As mentioned in the previous chapter, by the 1950s wage labour on the plantations was no longer obligatory by law; however, precarious economic conditions in the highlands forced Mayan peasants to continue seasonal labour migrations. All of the women in this sample spent some time on the *fincas* as young girls and young women, and for one-quarter (6/20) of them, *finca* income remains a part of their subsistence strategy.

The conditions of *finca* labour have improved marginally in the past decades. While previously labourers had to travel by foot to the coastal plantations, now large trucks transport the labourers to the plantations standing crowded in the back of the truck for hours. On Tuesdays and Fridays during the height of the harvest season, there are numerous trucks in the town plaza loading up contracted labourers, and for several months the poorest *aldeas* are almost completely deserted. While the cotton plantations often provide cooked food (tortillas and beans) for the workers, on the coffee plantations, where the majority of Comitecos work, labourers are responsible for their own food preparation. Thus the girls and women work double shifts, harvesting coffee during the day, and fulfilling domestic duties such as cooking, laundry, and childcare in the evenings and early mornings.

Some women, such as Apolonia, said that women are at a disadvantage on the *finca* because they have less physical strength than men. Many women can pick coffee as fast as men can; however, they have difficulty carry such heavy loads (often 100 pound bags) of coffee on their backs from the fields on the hill slopes back to the collection station. In addition, if a woman has an infant, she will carry the baby on her back the entire day. Thus the overall earnings of women on the *finca* tend to be less than men, as labourers are paid according to the amount of coffee delivered to the station.

Of course the *finca* continues to be a dependable source of income when no other options are available, despite the meager wages and difficult working conditions. As discussed earlier in relation to education, *finca* labour has changed in terms of who participates, conditions of participation, and objective of participation. Whereas previously, work on the *finca* was obligatory and vital to basic survival for almost everyone, now only the poorest sector of the population, that has very small land holdings and no craft production or local wage labour options, work on the *fincas* for basic survival. For most households it is a supplement to the household agricultural production and other income-generating activities. Families that meet educational expense needs through *finca* labour were described above.

Alternatively, more secure forms of wage labour have opened up to Comitecos in the past three decades. One-quarter of the middle-aged women in this sample have husbands with salaried jobs. Corina's husband was a police officer in other regions of Guatemala for 20 years; he regularly sent home money for the family, and visited once a month. Alejandra and Aida's husbands are teachers in local schools, and Ovida's ex-husband is a teacher in a neighbouring municipality. Alba's husband is a construction worker in town. All of these men maintain their *milpa* cultivation in addition to their paid work.

While none of the women in the previous generation had any type of wage labour except for *finca* contracts, some women in the middle generation have entered the salaried work force. One-quarter (5/20) of the women in this cohort of the sample have salaried work. Dolores and Ana work as community extension workers, Alejandra and Dominga have occasional work as health promoters, and Aida is a literacy instructor. This sample is not representative of the women of Comitancillo in general. This sample likely has a higher percentage than the general population of wage earners, because the sample was selected intentionally to reflect various life models, not to be statistically representative of the population under study. However, the sample does illustrate the types of salaried work open to women of this generation. The women of this age group that have slightly better Spanish language skills and some formal education are used as links/facilitators between the State/development institutions and the women in the community. In these jobs, the women act as bridges for short-term educational and health projects aimed at the majority of women still relatively segregated from mainstream society. They hold these jobs because of their unique, circumstantial conditions as literate women capable of acting as leaders and links in a particular period and place.

It is also important to note that the salaried jobs open to women of this generation are all located within the municipality. None of the women in this age group migrated to the urban centres to work as domestic servants; women in Comitancillo did not begin the urban migration for domestic work until the next generation (1980s). Women of the middle generation are still very geographically tied to their households and municipality.

4.5. Gender Dynamics in Household Management

Increasing cash income from wage labour and craft production is one way of offsetting the diminishing supply of staple foods produced within the household, and the increasing needs for cash for new expenses, such as children's education and medical services. This shift from subsistence production to cash income has a direct impact on the management of the household economy. For the previous generation of women, the small amounts of cash that passed through the household were in the hands of men, usually the oldest male household head. The majority of the family's material needs were met through direct household production or trade in the local market. With the advent of greater need for and dependence on cash circulation in the household economy, women and men have begun negotiating the management of this new element. It is the women in this middle generation that were impacted the most by this transition, and many of the women in the sample discussed the related tensions and outcomes.

The gender division of labour and the value attached to each type of work largely influences who has authority over money and resources. Ana provides an interesting example:

> Before I didn't [have any say about money] because for example when I sold a pig, [he would say]: "Where did the maize [that the pig ate] come from? From our farm, my sweat and work." So then a woman is left with doubts. He is right: it was his work. But the woman isn't thinking that she also put in her part, when she was feeding it everyday, or when she prepared food for the labourers who worked in the fields. But always a woman feels humble in front of the authority of the man. - Ana, 34

Ana's husband argued that because he produced the maize used to feed the pig, the money from the sale of the pig belonged to him. Ana's work to provide daily food and care for the animal for the five months does not have the same value as her husband's contribution. The production of staple grains (men's work) is viewed as the currency of subsistence, while daily animal maintenance (women's work) is accepted as a given with no economic value attached.

A related issue is the gendered nature of responsibilities within the household. Women are responsible for the nutritional and physical needs of their families. Thus while Alba has several small sources of cash income (blouses, baking, candles, and a market stall on Sundays), she uses her money for paying for grinding the maize for tortillas and providing her children with spending money and school supplies, both relatively new household expenses related to a women's sphere of responsibility. In Alba's case, her husband can respond to her requests for funds for food purchases as he sees fit; he is not automatically obligated to supply money for purchases of foodstuffs, because this is a woman's responsibility.

> The man [my husband] decides what to buy, why would I manage the money? I don't earn anything in the kitchen. So if I don't have enough sugar, I will go and ask him: Will you give me one or two *Quetzales* to buy sugar? Sometimes he gives it to me. Because I don't work, for that reason I don't have money. I don't earn much with embroidery of blouses: sometimes in 15 days or one month, I make a blouse. If I earn Q10 or Q15 sometimes I give 50 centavos to my children when they go to school [to buy snacks], and so the money goes like that. ...Also for the *molino*, the grinding is expensive now. Sometimes I spend 50-60 centavos per day. For my clothes, I decide to buy, but my husband has to give me the money to buy it. I have one new *corte* or blouse each year. I make my own *fajas*. – Alba, 32

Aida's husband is a teacher, but utilizes his salary to pay for his own expenses (he is studying at the University in Quetzaltenango on weekends) and pay for the tuition for his children's schooling; however, he does not pass her any money for household expenses. "He seems to think that children grow like animals, just eating grass," Aida says. She argues with her husband about where the money he earns goes, because he has not ever bought clothes for her or the children. He considers it her concern as a woman to feed and clothe the family. The unconscious (or conscious) reasoning seems to be rooted in the subsistence peasant economy, when women provided food and other basic necessities from the resource base of the farm, and had no need for cash or external inputs.

While Aida's case represents a subordinate, and possibly more organic, view of women's function in relation to household money and needs, the situation is very different for half of the women in the middle-aged sample who have much greater participation in cash management. These women say that their husbands discussed decisions about the use and expenditure of money with them. For example, Domitila describes it this way:

> Well, no one holds on to the money, neither he nor I, but rather we invest it directly in our expenses for the week...Neither of us takes the power to have the money in his or her hands, but rather we keep it in a place and then when we want to buy something we decide between us. - Domitila, 33

It is customary for many families to sit around the fire after the evening meal and discuss the work of the day, and plan the work for the next day. Perhaps the discussions about the management of money naturally fall into this pattern of family discussion. While it appears that the eldest male in the household makes the ultimate decisions on larger matters, the opinions and knowledge of the entire family are often taken into account.

The widowed or separated women that live independently obviously manage their own money, as does the one woman whose husband is sick and has been unable to work for the past seven years (Andrea). The women that live with their fathers (the one single woman, and several single mothers) have some independence in terms of small amounts of earnings from animal and craft production, but their fathers manage larger earnings and investments. Thus a single adult woman living in her father's household has a position and rights similar to a wife's.

Ana is one of the most discerning women in the sample regarding gender dynamics because of her thoughtful nature and extensive experience with outside institutions and ideas. Her discussion about the debates with her husband about the salary she earns working as a community facilitator for a community development organization are enlightening. Most obviously, a woman's authority to determine the use of household income is greater, although not complete, when she is a wage earner.

> When I started earning a salary, I made an agreement with my husband. In our culture it is the man who manages the money, but only if he does it in benefit of the family. So when I earn money I hand it over to my husband. He receives the money but we talk about how we are going to use it. He always asks me if I agree with how he is going to spend it, or if I have some needs. ...Now I have the right to say how we are going to spend the money. When I went to work for a salary it was different. – Ana, 34

5. Domestic Work: The Impacts of Technological Change

Despite the fact that basic reproductive needs do not appear to change greatly, either through time or across cultures, a comparison of the domestic responsibilities of the older generation and those of the middle-aged women demonstrates some dramatic shifts. Whenever women of any age are asked what they think are the biggest changes that have occurred in the lives of women since a generation ago, their immediate answer is: the grinding mill, potable water, and electricity.

The shift from the *metate* (traditional grinding stone) to the *molino* (the diesel-powered grinding mill) had a dramatic impact on women's lives throughout the maize-based culture of the Meso-American region. When grinding mills were introduced into nineteenth-century Mexican communities, there was considerable opposition from men because they felt it would impact the subordination of women within the family (Stem 1995:325). Women spent from six to eight hours per day grinding maize for tortillas; if they were suddenly freed of this burden, what would they do with their extra time and what would tie them to the household?

In the remote municipalities of the Guatemalan highlands, grinding mills have been introduced in the last few decades; and the male opposition was minimal because by now most people see the benefit of freeing women from this time-consuming task. In Comitancillo, the first grinding mill was established about ten years ago in the town centre. It has only been in the past four to five years that mills have been set up in about half of the 48 *aldeas.* The grinding mill radically reduces the amount of time women must spend on food preparation, and enables them to allocate greater time to income-generating activities. Usually it is the task of young children to carry the *nixtamal* in basins on the their heads in the early morning or at dusk to the mill to be ground. Some people still insist that the tortillas taste better if the *masa* (the maize after grinding) has been refined even further by a short cycle on the grinding stone before it is made into tortillas. Women who live far from mills lament the lack of this modem convenience in their lives, and a mill is one of the first requests women's groups everywhere make of NGO partners.

The time savings of the grinding mills are obvious, but the often forgotten drawback is that this service costs money. Grinding costs 30-70 *centavos* ($0.10 Can), depending on the amount of maize processed. As several women mentioned above, this cost can be a problem if the woman has little access to cash, and her husband deems it to be her responsibility.

The introduction of potable water is another of the technological modemizations that has dramatically affected the daily lives of women. Collecting water for household needs is another very time-consuming essential task. Almost all the *aldeas* of Comitancillo have had water systems installed in the past four or five years. The systems are usually partially funded by several levels of government and/or international development agencies, with the local community contributing raw materials and labour. Unfortunately the scarce and dwindling water sources and the great variations in elevation mean that often the systems are problem-prone.

Most of the communities have restrictions on using the tap water for washing clothes, so that the women still must make the trip to the nearest stream or river to do the laundry.

The third influential technological change that these women experienced during their lifetimes was the introduction of electricity. The town centre has had electricity since the 1940s, two adjacent *aldeas* were electrified in the early 1990s, and in the last several years the majority of the *aldeas* have been connected to the electrical grid. The introduction of electricity is much more controversial than grind mills or potable water. The construction of the systems was riddled with corruption and bribery at all levels of government, and the outcomes for the recipients are mixed. The monthly household costs are high; and as yet the benefits are meager, as little electricity is used for income-generating activities and its major use is for light in the evening, and radio and television. Having light in the evening is useful, particularly for students who study in the evenings; but for the vast majority of this rural population, life is still lived according to the rising and setting of the sun. Obviously the entrance of continuous radio and television broadcasts into this formerly remote region has had an impact on the local culture and its understanding of and relationship to the outside world, particularly for the young people.

6. Marriage and Reproduction

6.1. Weakening of Traditional Marriage Union

In addition to household-based economic survival strategies, the other arena of significant transition for middle-aged women is that of marriage and household relationships. The inevitable pattern of marriage, patrilocal (virilocal) residence, and childbearing begins to show more diversity for women born and maturing after the middle of the century. As in their productive lives, women's marriages and reproductive lives show a somewhat greater range of options, but they also have some new challenges to their security and position within the community/society. Some basic information on the marital and reproductive lives of the twenty women in the middle-aged cohort is outlined in Table 6.

Of the 20 women interviewed between the ages of 30 and 50 years, eleven are currently married and living with their husbands and unmarried children. Several also have at least one of their parents or their husband's parents living in the household. Only one of the women (Dolores) is unmarried. Single, never-married women are a rarity in this age group, as marriage and childbearing are the expected life patterns for women. It is customary for both single women and men continue to live with their parents.

Traditional courtship and marriage is still the norm for women in this age group. The majority followed the traditional custom of seeking parental permission to converse before initiating a relationship. Only in two cases (Ana María, and Aida) did the couple initiate conversation without first obtaining parental permission.

Table 6: Marital and Reproductive Profiles - Middle-Aged Women (30-50 years old)

Name	Age	Marital Status	Age at First Marriage	Total No. of Births	Infant Deaths
Alicia	46	2x married, and husbands left for other women	19	7	2
Catarina	45	Married	17	13	3
Angelica	43	Widowed at age 24	18	3	0
Corina C.	42	Married	16	8	2
Dolores	42	Single, lives with parents	--	0	0
Camila	40	Married	19	6	2
Fidelia	40	Married	15	7	1
Cecilia	40	Widowed at age 37	18	6	1
Apolonia	39	Married	13	8	1
Aida	39	Married (but widowed in May 2001)	17	11	1
Alejandra	38	Married	20	14	5
Berta	37	Married	18	8	2
Dora	35	Married	16	10	3
Ana	34	Married	16	8	0
Andrea	34	Widowed at age 31	16	5	?
Domitila	33	Married	16	7	?
Dominga	33	Widowed at age19; since has three kids as a single mother	14	5	0
Ana María	33	Separated	20	2	0
Alba	32	Married	16	7	0
Carmen	30	Husband abandoned, lives with her parents and five children	14	5	0
Average	37.7		16.7 years	7.4	1.35

Marriage continued to be sanctioned and celebrated by traditional customs. For example, Beatriz chose her husband following the traditional custom at age 15 years: he came to the house and asked her father for permission to talk with her. After they talked in front of her parents for several months, the young man paid a bride price, and they agreed to be married.

> My parents did not say anything to me; rather I married this man with my own will. In that time a woman had to be bought when she married a man. In my case, I was married for Q5.00. This money stayed with my father, it was not mine. My father received this money and he kept it as a security between my husband and me. My father said to me: I will keep this money in case there is a problem between you while you are still just talking. If there is a problem then I can give the money to the young man and he will leave without a problem. It's not like now that a young woman gets married with a man just receiving a piece of gum, and when the parents become aware of it, she is already living in the house of her parents-in-law or in any other place. Now the customs do not exist that we had before.
>
> For example, when I was married, there were celebrations as was customary. The parents of my husband arrived to take me home. They brought a good quantity of bread and other things to share with the whole family. Afterwards, my parents and my parents-in-law gave us advice in a very strict way. They spoke like this: young woman, this man will be your husband today and forever. Now you can't regret it, as you have chosen this man as your true spouse, come what may. Therefore you do not have the right to talk with another man. The same was said to my husband. Of course we had to pass on our knees in front of our elders to receive our respective counsel, and each one gave us very different counsels from the one before. –Beatriz, 40

While the women in this middle-age group maintained the traditional courtship and marriage customs, there is less certainty and more diversity in the outcomes and courses of these marriages. In several cases the women's husbands had liaisons with other women (Carmen, Corina, Dora), four women became widows at a young age and decided not to remarry, and one woman has never married.

It is conventional to say that Mayan men do not have the same *machista* attitude commonly found among Ladinos that involves the conquest of many women, rather Mayan men are stereotyped as being faithful and dedicated husbands and fathers. However, in the generation of Comitecos born after 1950, the occurrence of frequent ex-marital liaisons is evident. Women respond to this situation in various ways depending on the level of economic support that the husband provides for his original family, abusive treatment, their concern for their children, and their ability to find recourse in community and legal authorities.

Dora's husband had an on-going relationship with a young woman whom his family had adopted as a child. Although she suffered physical and verbal abuse, Dora did not take action against him because she feared for her children; and she did not know how to access external support, particularly because the justice system was now functioning in Spanish, and she is monolingual Mam.

> In truth I suffered a lot when that woman got involved with my husband. How many people at the *finca* saw when my husband grabbed me by the hair and hit me hard with a stick until I was bleeding. It was his intention to abandon me and marry the other woman. He always told me to leave him because he no longer wanted to see me in his house, but I could not leave my children. Rather I just had to bear everything until that woman left the house. Even though I thought of leaving him, I could never leave my children. I had no idea how to go and charge him [at the Justice of the Peace]; rather I just waited to see what would happen to me. I think there are very few women who have the courage to charge their husbands, only those women who speak Spanish. But in my case, I never thought of going in front of the judge; rather I had to live a very sad life. –Dora, 35

While Dora just waited out the conflict, and eventually the other woman left, and her marriage with her husband was restored, Carmen, whose story is told earlier in this chapter, was forced to return with her children to her father's house. Carmen also felt the disadvantage of being uneducated and a non-Spanish speaker, and thus unable to seek recourse in the justice system.

In contrast, Corina has extensive Spanish ability and confidence in the Ladino world, so when issues arose in her marriage, she confronted her husband and marshaled many resources. Corina's husband worked for many years as a police officer stationed in other municipalities in highland Guatemala and in the capital city. When Corina discovered that he had established a second home with another woman and for this reason had begun to visit less frequently and send less money, she was angry and confronted him. She managed to get his police chief to reprimand him, and ensure that he sent a portion of his salary home to Comitancillo. Today he has retired from the police force and is living again with her and their children in Comitancillo.

Five of the women are widows (Angelica, Cecilia, Andrea, Aida, Dominga). The causes of the death of their husbands are significant. The husbands of Angelica, Cecilia, and Aida all died in alcohol-related accidents. Angelica became a widow at age 24 with three sons (18 years ago), Aida when she was 39 (one year ago) with eleven children, and Cecilia when she was 37 years ago with six children. Ironically, both Dominga's and Carmen's husbands died when they were hit by lightning. Dominga became a widow at aged 20 with two children (13 years ago), and Andrea at age 31 with five children (three years ago). Dominga's husband was struck by lightning while tying up a horse in the stable during a thunderstorm. Andrea's husband was a pastor in the evangelical church, and as he left the church building one evening he was struck by lightning.

All of these women have chosen neither to remarry nor to live with their parents or parents-in-law. The most common reason for not remarrying was consideration of what would happen to their children. Traditionally, when women remarried, their children from the first marriage remained in the household of their maternal grandparents or a maternal uncle. But none of these women wanted to be separated from their children. Angelica describes this concern as follows:

> "No [I didn't think to remarry] because I worried about my children. Maybe he [a new husband] would beat my children, because men don't like the children of other men. For this reason I did not think of remarrying; I am just with them. So, what I did was go out to work every day; until now I have never stopped working. – Angelica,43

These widows made the decision to establish their own households, and to struggle alone for the sustenance and well being of their children. This is a choice that was not available to women in the first part of the century because social custom dictated that women be contained within a male-headed household, and because limited economic options required a basic male-female unit for subsistence survival. During these women's lifetimes, the social customs surrounding women's marital and household relationships became more flexible; and traditional female work became more commercialized. All of these female heads of households engage in a range of productive strategies to maintain their families, including *milpa* cultivation, animal raising, textile production, wage labour as domestic servants and literacy instructors, and receiving remittances from adult children working in the capital city.

Angelica is an astonishing example of the complex balance of productive activities required for survival and success as a female head of household. She was widowed when her three sons were eight, three, and one year old. After waiting the customary nine days after the death and burial of her husband, she returned to live with her mother rather than stay with her parents-in-law. For ten years she lived with her mother in the town centre. This central location meant that more income-earning possibilities were available to Angelica than if she had been in a more distant *aldea*. Living with her mother meant that she had one more person to support, but also provided her with childcare assistance while she worked outside the home. She worked for wages at the town bakery owned by a Ladino family, doing cleaning and cooking for the family, beginning at Q15 and eventually earning Q25 per month. Then one of the teachers in the local school offered her the job of cooking the government-sponsored mid-morning snack for the students. This job paid Q25 per month, and required only one hour of work per day. She occasionally did laundry for other Ladino town families, and continued to cultivate *milpa* on the piece of land she had inherited about 20 minutes' walk from town. She went twice to work on the *finca*, but found that it was too difficult with her young children. Her eldest son was selected to be a sponsored child in an international sponsorship program (Christian Children's Fund), and this program covered half the cost of his schooling and some of his other expenses. She supported her mother, financed her sons' schooling, and saved money to build a small house on her land. About six years ago she moved with her sons to her own house. She continues to cultivate *milpa* and do laundry for town residents; and has added a small business selling hot rice drinks and buns in the afternoons in the market, and on Sundays at the animal market. When the boys were older they all went for several months to the *finca* to earn the extra money needed for her oldest son Martín's final year in high school and his graduation. She has also recently joined in a collective pig-raising project, and occasionally produces embroidered blouses for sale. Martín is now working as a teacher, and helps pay for his younger brothers who are still in school. As a single mother, she not only works at a variety of productive activities, she also continues to be responsible for the cooking, cleaning, and washing that are a woman's role. It was not possible to catch Angelica loitering or just relaxing; the only time to have a conversation with her and a glimpse of her cheerful smile was if one sat at her table in the market, and drank *arroz-con-leche* (a hot rice milk drink); and chatted with her between serving other customers.

Dominga is a unique case. After her husband died when she was twenty years old, she returned with her two small daughters to live with her widowed father in her house of origin. Since then she has had three more children with a man from a neighbouring municipality. Her father has since remarried, and moved to live with his new wife. Dominga has remained in the house with her children, and has de facto inherited the house. She is quite bitter about the experience with the father of her youngest three children, as the man is married and has a family in a nearby town, and only visits her occasionally.

> The father of my children does not help me at all with the expenses [of the household]. When he comes to see me I always ask him for some money, but he always says that he does not have any. So what's the point of having a man like that? I prefer to be alone with my children although I am struggling to survive; it's better than fighting with an irresponsible man. Dominga, 33

Her father was angry with her when she became pregnant the first time after her husband died:

> My father was not in agreement in the birth of the baby because there was no father, as in the case of the first two. Afterwards, little by little, he conformed because there was nothing he could do since I had already committed the error. Dominga, 33

But living as a single woman, without a father, husband, or male relative can be distressing for a woman, as she can be the target of other men, especially if there is evidence that she may be a "loose" woman who does not necessarily abide by the proper code of behaviour for women.

> Sure [there are men that pester me], but I don't pay any attention to them, and until now nothing tragic has ever happened to me, thank God. Also I think that it has to do with the woman herself, if she likes to be talking in any place with men, because men also pester/tease/harass a lot if you let them. For example, when I go to do my errands, I don't return by the same path, but rather I try to return by different paths because of my fear of the men. But until now, nothing has happened. Dominga, 33

Dominga sustains her family by cultivating *milpa,* harvesting apples and peaches for sale in the market, weaving on a backstrap and a foot loom, and working as a part-time health promoter in a community health project.

6.2. The Constancy of Endogamy

The continued high rate of endogamy in this community is clearly apparent in this sample of middle-aged women. Not only are all but one of the women married to fellow Comitecos, but in addition all but two are married to men from the same or an immediately adjacent *aldea.* Of the 20 women in this cohort, five (Andrea, Alejandra, Camila, Dora, Domitila) met on the *finca* even though except for one case, they are all from neighbouring *aldeas.* (Alejandra is the only one from outside of Comitancillo, from the municipality of San Pedro, who married into the community.) The other 15 women (75%) knew their future husbands because they were neighbours. They met their future-husbands while doing errands, on the road because they were neighbours (11), at church (2), or at school (2).

Although there is no articulated rule that one must marry a fellow Comitancillo, it seems to be expected if one is to continue as a member of the community. Alternatively, there is a sense that there really is no one else who would want to marry into the community and live there as a Comiteco. The high rate of endogamy ensures that the clear boundaries between Comitecos and Mayas from other communities as well as Ladinos are maintained.

6.3. Childbearing: Considered but Unchanged

For the most part, reproduction continues to be a predictable part of women's lives. The women in this middle age group are at the beginning of the movement to reassess fertility and the impact of large families. Based in a rural farming culture, they still see families as having, and needing, as many children as "God gives them." Generally, children are seen as an asset. However, middle-aged women are experiencing the increasing costs and expectations of raising children, and at the same time they are witnessing the failure of many children to support their parents in their old age because their lives led them in different physical and social directions. While these women are rethinking the benefits of large families, for the most part they do not have the power to change anything in this aspect of their lives.

> In truth, I don't know how many children I will have; rather I just wait for the Will of God. – Domitila, 33
>
> For me it is better to have less [children] because it is difficult to maintain a lot of children. Worse yet, in the times we are living in now, things are so expensive; and as a parent if one does not have fixed work or a wage, from where will you obtain the money for these expenses? In our case we do not have an artisan skill or education, we are just dedicated to working in the fields. – Camila, 40

Another deterrent to family planning is the perception among men that if women use birth control, they will have increased independence; and men will lose some of their control over women. This is an objection to birth control that is relatively common in patriarchal cultures, in which men's control over women's reproduction is central to their position in the household and in society, and to their need to guarantee the continuation of their own bloodlines (Smith 1995). Alternatively, within a *machisto* perspective, women's use of birth control is a threat to a demonstration of male virility and prerogative. While patriarchy and *machismo* perceptions are not as acute within the Mayan culture as in the neighbouring Ladino culture, there does seem to be some cultural influence of Ladino thinking among Mayan men.

> My idea is to stay with the number of children I have now (eight), but we will see what happens. It is a little difficult to live with my husband, because he doesn't want us to use birth control, or to stop having children. He doesn't want to because he says that it is a sign that I don't love him. But that is a lie, because really what I am looking for is to space the children, to have a little more [materially] for them. But he is against birth control. But even though this is a secret, I am doing something [she gets birth control injections]. I hope that I will not get pregnant during the next two years while my youngest baby is growing. This way I can leave a space between children. I have my plan.
>
> There are many men who say that if a woman uses birth control it is so that she can have another man. ...Others say that if a woman uses birth control, she is useless, that she no longer has affection for her husband. But I think this is a lie. We as women do not think about having other men, we just want to have a space between our children. The children need us. But sometimes the men don't understand. –Ana, 34

Although her husband thinks that they should have as many children as God sends them, Ana thinks that the ideal number of children would be four or five; that way she could give them better-quality food, clothing, and education. At present, Ana and her husband have eight children; and it is a struggle to cover their needs.

Surprisingly, in Ana's case she is secretly defying her husband's wishes; and using a form of birth control to "space" her children. The majority of women do not have the resources or wherewithal to defy the specific expectations of their husbands. This situation is exacerbated by the lack of accessible and relevant information and resources for women concerning birth control. Catholicism, *machismo,* and the traditional rural need for large families all combine to support the continued acceptance of large families despite lack of resources, land, and a high infant mortality rate. Despite the growing awareness of women in this age group of the benefits of smaller families, and greater space between pregnancies, for the most part these women do not have the power to act upon their inclinations.

6.4. New Approaches to Old Tensions in Household Relations

The variability and complexity of social relations within the extended family households of Comitancillo is an important theme for women of the middle-age group, just as they were for the older generation, likely because the quality of women's lives is so intimately affected by these relationships. At times, common interests and goals unite all the members of the household; and at other times, various members have conflicting or unifying interests, needs, and aspirations. Sometimes alliances and conflicts have a gender dimension (e.g., a husband and wife), sometimes an age alignment (e.g., generational differences), and at other times it is persons in similar positions (e.g. two daughters-in-law).

One of the predominant and continuing themes in women's lives is the subordination and uncertainty of being a young daughter-in-law in the household of her husband's family. Her experience as a young bride is often determined by the personalities of her new parents-in-law, and her willingness to work as hard as possible to please them.

> I lived five years in the house of my parents-in-law. They treated me well because I always stayed behind doing all the work in the kitchen. There were problems in the home, but little by little they were solved. Maybe one cannot live without problems. - Apolonia, 39

But the women were not completely submissive to the authority of their husbands and parents-in-law. Many of the women told of situations in which they quietly pressed for their own interests, as in the case of Alba:

> I went to live in his house, with his mother; as he was the youngest son, all the other brothers had moved out. But I always went to visit my mother. I could not forget my mother. He got mad. He said that I had to forget about her or go back to her once and for all. I told him that I would forget about my mother if he forgot about his mother. – Alba, 32

Sympathetic parents-in-law can be a support for a young woman, as in the case of Corina When her husband was drunk and beat her, her father-in-law would come to her defense, and even call the local community authorities (*los auxiliares*) to put him in jail for a few days. On the other hand, Carmen's parents-in-law accepted their son's abusive behaviour towards her.

> My husband treated me badly because he drank a lot...He hit me a lot when he drank, and scared the children when he arrived home. My parents-in-law supported him that he beat me hard until I could no longer defend myself. I felt very bad, sad, and cried bitterly. My own parents just said: well you deserve it because you looked for a husband, if you would have studied, you would have had a good job, and wouldn't have to put up with this. If the parents-in-law are good, they will defend you; if not, the woman just has to suffer it. – Carmen, 30

Despite her parents' initial lack of support, Carmen eventually returned home to live with them.

The presence of more than one daughter-in-law in the household can also be a source of tension, because they are often in competition for resources and preference in the household.

> When I arrived to live with my parents-in-law everything was fine. But then another daughter-in-law arrived and we were just fighting, she and I. It was altogether a big problem. For this reason I had to come back to live in the house of my deceased parents, and my husband came to live with me. - Beatriz, 40

When a woman returns to live with her family of origin after she is widowed or separated, she returns to the domination of her father or adult brothers. Ana María is advised and directed by her elder brother living in Guatemala City, as her father, who is still alive, is alcoholic and does not run the household. Ana María and her mother and sisters largely run the house as they see fit, but for major decisions her older brother in Guatemala City is asked for direction.

Returning to the home of one's father or brother is traditionally the only option for women who are widowed or separated. The opposite is also true. If a woman is in an unbearable situation in the household of her father, maternal uncle, or brother, her only practical option for escape is to marry; and then she become a member of her husband's household. Several women in the older generation of respondents indicated that escaping from an abusive home life was the reason that they married. In the middle-aged group, this was a motivating factor for several women. In Apolonia's case, she lived under her brother's authority after the death of her father; however, his abuse prompted her into marriage at a young age.

> I married when I was 13 years old. I had to marry at this age because it was better to marry than to be suffering with my brother...The problem was that my brother beat me a lot and insulted me with ugly words; he even threw me out of the house for whatever reason. Well, at the time, my mother was still alive, and she told my brother not to abuse me; but he began to tell her to get out of the house for defending me. For this reason there was no solution or understanding in our home. My brother ordered me to carry firewood, hay, and do other work in the fields. If I did not obey him, he would beat me and insult me that I was the only one still living with him; all of my other older siblings had married. I was the youngest daughter; for this reason I suffered in the house of my brother because he stayed in the house of my parents because he was the first son and the oldest of all. - Apolonia, 39

Until the mid-1980s, women still had the option of appealing to the community court for conflict resolution and community protection and sanction. Cases from this period (1950-1970) were described and analyzed in the previous chapter. At this point, it is sufficient to reiterate that the corporate community provided considerable sanction on male abuses of women within the community. Several women commented that during the period when there was a community panel that processed complaints, they felt that their problems were taken seriously and justice was done. In the early 1990s, when a Justice of the Peace from outside was established in the community, the dynamics shifted drastically. The women feel that now the authorities are more susceptible to bribery, and are less willing to protect the women of the community; and, as in the case of Dora, the Spanish language utilized in the court was an enormous barrier to access.

> I remember that before there was justice against me if they committed a crime. They had to work for the Municipality, sweeping garbage in the street, carrying stones, and other things. But now the men just quickly give money to the judge, and they are easily let go of their charges. This is one of the changes I observe today; maybe the law of our ancestors will never again live among us. – Alicia, 46

7. Ethnic Identity: I am a Woman, Comiteca, Mam, and Poor

Women in this middle-age group continue to define their ethnicity by geography and visible social characteristics. Their ethnic identity is very locally based, within the *aldea* and then within the Municipality. For these middle-aged women, there is some sense of commonality with Maya from other communities, but who they are is definitely determined by the particular community they are born in and the language they speak. It is also significant to note that they always identify themselves as female, never as just as a "person" of a particular ethnic group. It appears that being a woman of a particular ethnic identity has a meaning different from that of a man of the same ethnic group.

> I am a woman who is Comiteca, Mam-speaker, and poor. – Dolores, 42

> I am from [names *aldea*]. I am a woman from Comitancillo, and truly a Mayan-speaker. At the *finca* people from different places are differentiated by the different *cortes* they wear. There are people from Quiché and San Miguel, and so on. There is much difference between indigenous people and Ladinos. The Ladinos don't speak a Mayan language, and the Ladinos have different customs that we do. - Carmen, 30

Domitila has picked up the official discourse and vocabulary of the Guatemalan state that asserts that the state recognizes and respects the country's ethnic diversity; yet ultimately her identity is locally created and sustained.

> I identify myself as a Mayan-speaking, Comiteca, and Guatemalan woman, because I do not come from any other place, nor do I speak any other language, so therefore I am a person of pure Mayan origin. It is true that Guatemala is a multilingual, pluricultural, and multiethnic country; but we are differentiated by different characteristics such as in our case as Comitecos. We are a community that possesses our own customs, and so that's how I identify who I am. - Domitila, 33

Place of birth and residence is even more important than social and economic networks. The *aldea* where Catarina lives is located on the fringes of the official boundaries of Comitancillo, about a three-hour walk to the town centre. People in this community are better connected by road to Tejutla, the neighbouring municipality; and more frequently travel to do business and marketing in Tejutla. However, they still feel strongly that they are Comitecos.

> We feel that we are true Comitecos, because we belong there. We went there to register each one of us, and all my family was born precisely in the community of the Municipality of Comitancillo. Furthermore, it is here that we received our inheritance from our parents, so for that reason we cannot separate ourselves from our municipality. It is true that we live far away from the town, but we are fine. – Catarina, 45

It is important to note the somewhat hidden but strong link between ethnic identity and economic class. Several women's comments hint at the sense of economic stratification and their position as Comitecas and Maya within the hierarchy. The following exchange between Alba and the interviewer illustrates the significance of economic status in ethnic identification.

> A : I am of [names *aldea*], Comitancillo.
> Int.: Do you ever think, for example – I am Mam, or Maya, or Guatemalan?
> A: No.
> Int.: If you meet a woman from San Pedro, do you think that you and her are the same?
> A: No, the San Pedranas treat us badly. When they come to buy in the animal market, they think that we are different because they have more money.
> Int.: If you meet a peasant from Quiché?
> A: We are equals, we are poor rural people [*pobres del campo*]
> Int.: What if you meet a Ladina?
> A: No, we are not equal.
> -Conversation between Interviewer (Int.) and Alba (A), 32

A woman's clothes not only identify her municipal and ethnic origins, they are also representative of her economic class; and in the case of the middle-aged women of Comitancillo, they position themselves within the poorest economic strata of society.

> My *huipil* was made of an old sugar sack, and my *corte* was the traditional dark blue, when I was young. It's not like now that the young people dress as elegantly as they can; before, if someone was dressed elegantly then people thought they must be thieves; at least that's what my grandmother told me. When I got older, they bought me a red *huipil* and a dark blue *corte*; but when I was little, my clothes were very ordinary...- Alicia, 46

Among this generation of women, and the previous generation, there is a noticeable absence of an identity as a language or larger cultural grouping within the Maya. Women identify themselves as from Comitancillo, or when they are outside the community, they identify themselves as members of the larger mass of "indigenous". In Mam, they describe themselves as *ajTxoljaqin* (*aj*=a person of; *Txolja*=the name for their community, or peoples).[5] When outside

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[5] The linguistic information comes from a personal communication with Lic. Rubén Feliciano.

Comitancillo, and speaking with non-Mayans, the Comitecos usually identify themselves using a generalized term for "indigenous" (*Qxjalel* or *qxjalelqin*) or using the term "*natural*," a word originating in the colonial period that means "uncivilized." Interestingly, cultural and linguistic markers are absent as the women define themselves with either a specific location (Comitancillo) or with a larger, generalized socio-economic category (indigenous). The women of this generation do not immediately identify themselves with a larger linguistic group of Mam-speaking peoples, nor with a historically- and culturally-defined peoples, such as the larger Mam region. It appears that the linguistically-based nations that existed before the arrival of the Spanish (the Mam, the Quiché, the Kakchiquel) disappeared during the conquest, and this middle level of ethno-cultural designation between the specific community and larger racial grouping, has been lost.

8. Male Alcoholism: The Continuing Burden of Women

Male alcoholism continues to impact women's lives in Comitancillo. Women rarely drink themselves. It seems to be accepted behaviour that men will occasionally go on drinking binges, usually around fiesta times or when they have finished a *finca* contract. Alcohol consumption is also seen as an outlet for men's frustrations and problems, such as heavy workloads and economic struggles. For example, Alba described the complications she and her brothers faced when their mother was gravely ill in a hospital in Guatemala City. In the middle of the situation her brothers went on a drinking binge, so that she had to deal with not only caring for her mother but also her drunk brothers. She explained this in the following way:

> Alba: Men get drunk when they are sad.
> Adrienne: What do women do when they are sad?
> Alba: They cry.

Within this sample of middle-aged women, two have husbands with severe on-going drinking problems (Alejandra, Corina); and three have lost their husbands in alcohol-related accidents (Angelica, Aida, Cecilia). A common pattern appears to be frequent binge drinking during the earlier years of marriage, and then men's alcohol consumption diminishes later in life. Such was the case for Alba:

> We fought in the first years [of our marriage]. He got drunk every week or so. He never hit us, but he broke doors, plates and so on. And he didn't insult us with words. My oldest daughter was very scared. When I said, "Here comes your father drunk," she

> would go hide under the bed, or in the *chuj*, or in any other place. I think that this hurt her. But later, in the past three years, he hasn't been drinking. Now he is part of the board at the local Catholic church, and he is the vice-president. – Alba, 32

Obviously, the main impacts on women of men's drinking are their unpredictable and abusive behaviour when they are drunk, and the diversion of scarce cash income into the purchase of alcohol. Unfortunately women have little control over this drinking, and are often expected to accept and assist their husbands when they are drunk. A very common sight in the late afternoon of market day is a woman and her children sitting quietly by the road waiting for their drunk husband/father to wake up so that they can walk home to the *aldea*.

9. Recurring Themes: Capability, Resignation, and Well-being

For the majority of the middle-aged women in this sample, life continues to be a series of conditions, occurrences, and expectations that they must bear and make the best of. The satisfaction and joy they find in life comes from the areas in their lives in which they have some influence and that enable them to ensure the well-being of their families. Their main fears and unhappinesses originate in the occurrences that are outside their control (such as illness, drought, and accidents) and in conflict within the household.

Overwhelmingly, and perhaps understandably, women's sense of happiness and sadness in life is tied to the health and well-being of their families. All of the 20 women in this cohort indicated that they felt happy when their families were healthy, and had enough material resources to cover their basic needs.

Some examples are as follows:

- I feel happy because my children and I have good health – Alicia
- I am happy when we don't have problems, he's not drinking [alcohol], and we have good health – Corina
- I am happy that I am healthy and my children are healthy... when we have enough to eat – Aida
- I am happy when we are enjoying good health and we have what we need to survive. – Beatriz

The well-being of their families, and thus their own personal contentment, largely hinges on their ability to provide for their families in a dependable manner. The unpredictable and precarious nature of most household economies in Comitancillo makes enduring economic security uncommon. Thus women find great satisfaction and pride in their abilities to undertake rewarding income-generating activities in addition to their subsistence work, particularly animal husbandry and craft production:

> One thing that makes me a little happy is...when I sell some animals, because then I have a few cents to buy something. For example last week I sold some chickens and with the money I bought some maize – Carmen, 30
>
> I am very happy for my animals. For example right now I have some pigs that I am fattening, as well as some chickens. – Dora, 35
>
> I am happy when all goes well with our work and with my animals – Catarina, 45
>
> The things that make me happy are that I know how to embroider by machine and now I have a market where I sell blouses every week, so I have some money when I sell a blouse. I am also very happy for my sale to the students, because each time when I go to sell [snacks to the students] I finish my selling my goods and when I return home I have some money – Berta, 37

In a life full of uncertainties, the ability to have, and excel, at an income-generating skill is a source of satisfaction and security. Women who live independent of a husband or male relative feel particularly proud and secure when they have found a way to provide for their families.

> I am happy because I am living in my house with my children; although it is a little difficult to live alone with the children, a persistent a woman can do it. – Dominga, 33 (widowed)

The shifting of responsibility and the maturing of children eases the worries of many women:

> I am happy because my children are grown up, and now they help me to do some of the work; it's not like before when I was left with them [when my husband died], it was very difficult to live. But now, I am not suffering so much with them. I have a few cents, and my children and I are healthy – Angelica, 43

Collective organization is another source of pride for the women because it is another source of income and independence for them.

> What makes me happy in my life is that presently I am participating in a group of women organized with AMMID...I am very proud to belong to that group because I have had certain experiences in many activities, and I am the president of the group in this community. – Alicia, 46

10. Summary

The narratives of the women in the middle generation (born between 1950 and 1970) show a diversification of productive and reproductive possibilities; however, parallel to this tendency, the traditional norms that provided women with some degree of protection, future reward, and household stability are weakening, leaving this middle group somewhat vulnerable. They are wedged between a more traditional, predictable pattern, and the contemporary context in which young women have a greatly expanded world of possibilities, as well as new challenges and obstacles.

These 20 women cannot be grouped into specific discrete categories, but rather are better described as falling in a range of possibilities; and can be grouped for similarities depending on the specific area of analysis. One of the factors closely associated with the degree of variation from the traditional pattern is proximity to the town centre, and access to school, institutions, and businesses. Obviously, the easier access a woman has to educational and marketing opportunities, the greater the ability to expand into new areas. The evidence of this sample supports this generalization: the poorest women lived in the most distant *aldeas*, while the women living closer to the town centre or on main roads, did better economically regardless of whether they were married, single, separated, or widowed.

However, it also becomes apparent that individual circumstance and personality also play a prominent role in shaping the lives of these women. How much education they have, their opportunities for productive work, their relationships within the household, and the events that affect their lives are all influenced by both conditions outside their control, and by individual character traits. It is clear from the narratives of these women that they desire greater self-sufficiency, self-determination, and security in their lives as individual women, for their families and for their community as a whole. Rather than just living with *paciencia* (patience), the word commonly used in Comitancillo to express the sentiment that a person must accept and bear whatever life throws at him or her, these women enjoy the traditional and new areas in their lives in which they have a measure of control.

Chapter Six
The Daughters: New Paths through Changing Terrain

1. Introduction

The lives of the "daughters" of Comitancillo (women between the ages of 17 and 30) are a dramatic departure from the life paths of their mothers and grandmothers. Dialogue with 18 young Comiteca women in this age group generated four basic identifiable patterns: women in traditional household situations; independent single mothers; young women balancing careers and families; and single "career" women (Table 7). As always, the most visible variables in women's lives are marital/household structures and economic occupation; however, more subtle factors such as shifting power relations within the household, changing ethnic identities and relationships within the wider community and nation, and growing space for individual self-determination are also apparent in the lives of the youngest generation of women in Comitancillo.

Obviously, these young women have lived through the most dramatic period of externally-imposed change on the community. The last two decades have witnessed the electrification of the community, entrance of roads and a continuous flow of vehicles connecting the community with the outside world, the exponential growth of educational opportunities, the further decline of subsistence farming; the years of armed conflict, fear, and insecurity that racked the country; and the emergence of the Maya Movement, just to name a few. These externally imposed developments have also created an internal momentum for change that affects each sector of the community in different ways, as gender, age, geographical location, are all differentially impacted by the changes.

This chapter will explore the dramatic and subtle differences between the lives of these women and those of their "mothers" and "grandmothers." The first section will provide a brief description of each of the basic types of young women in the community. This section will be followed by a more in-depth discussion and comparison of the major elements of these women's lives: education, land, economics, marriage, reproduction, family dynamics, and ethnic identity.

Table 7: Participant Profile – Young Women (17-30 Years)

Type and Percentage of Total Population*	Age	Years of School**	Marital Status	No. of Children	Economic Activities -Wage Work	Craft Production	Agricultural Production
Traditional Married 65%							
Rosaura	29	3	Widowed	4		Crocheted Bags -G	Poultry
Susana	27	6+3 =9	Married	5	Literacy Instructor	Machine Embroidery G	Poultry
Sofia	28	3	Married	4		Machine Embroidery	
Sandra	21	7	Married	3-1 =2			
Single Mothers 10%							
Raquel	30	4	Separated	3	NGO Outreach Worker		
Ruth	28	7+4 = 11	Single	2	NGO Outreach Worker; Student	Machine Embroidery G	
Tomasa	23	4	Single	1			Pig Raising
Ramona	22	7	Single	1	Weaving Instructor G	Weaver large vol.	None
Career/ Family 5%							
Silvia	28	12	Married	2	Teacher		None
Rosa	28	12	Married	2	Teacher	Weaving G	None
Rebeca	25	12	Married	2	Teacher	Machine Embroidery	None
Single Career 10%							
Roberta	30	4+5=9	Single	0	Ass. Teacher	Weaving G	Assist Parents
Rosa María	30	3	Single	0	NGO Worker	Weaving G	Assist Parents
Violeta	28	2+10=12	Single	0	Teacher	Machine Embroidery G	None
Reina	28	1+5 =6	Single	0	Weaving Instructor G	Weaver	Assist Parents
Teresa	25	10	Single	0	Ass. Teacher		None
Teenagers 10%							
Veronica	19	3	Single	0	Domestic Servant		None
Victoria	17	11	Single	0	High School Student		Assist Parents
Average	26	7					

*The roughly estimated percentage of women aged 18 to 30 in Comitancillo who could be classified within these groupings.

**Years of schooling: the first number is the years received as a child, the number after the plus-sign is the number of years taken as an adult G = Group productive activity

2. Four New Paths and a Glimpse of the Future

2.1. Transforming the Traditional: Young Married Women

This is the group that is likely the majority in Comitancillo; while an exact proportion is not available, it is estimated that this pattern represents the lives of about two-thirds of the young women of this community. These young women (exemplified by four cases in this study) have, at least by outward appearance, followed the traditional pattern of minimal education, early marriage, frequent pregnancies, and reproductive and productive work within the rural peasant household. Yet, the interviews reveal significant changes and renegotiations of power and position within this traditional framework. Susana's story is illustrative of the women in this group:

> Susana
>
> Susana (27) might be the most traditional of these four types of young women in that the most basic elements in her life are similar to her grandmother's and her mother's. She grew up in her father's house, the daughter of an itinerant merchant and a weaver; and worked in the house and the fields. She had more education that her foremothers, finishing grade six. She literally married the "boy-next-door," moved to live within the patrilocal household, and began giving birth every year or two. She does a variety of activities to support her family: raising poultry, weaving *fajas*, and assisting her husband to cultivate their small plot of *milpa*.
>
> However, in all other respects her life is very different. Susana is a very bright, cheerful, and energetic woman. In her late teens, her need to be involved in more than just the life of the household resulted in her being one of the first women in a newly forming women's group in the community. She quickly became a dynamic leader in the group. She was instrumental in the establishment of a cooperative sewing machine project with external financial support.
>
> She did marry the "boy-next-door," a young man she had known all her life; and he is a teacher. He was one of the first to graduate with a grade twelve teacher's diploma from the local High School established in 1987 (Colegio Juan Diego). He worked for several years for local community organizations, and eventually got a teaching position in one of the local schools. He has a somewhat more liberal attitude toward women's education, and encouraged Susana to continue studying. She enrolled in a correspondence program by radio, and completed grade nine. Now she has a job teaching literacy in the community several hours per week.
>
> She has had five babies in the first four years of their marriage. She feels the burden of having so many children. She is particularly concerned about how they will support all their children if they continue to have babies at this rate. She would like to use some form of birth control, but her husband refuses to allow her to do so.
>
> Despite the rapid growth of their family, they have done fairly well economically. They have built a house for themselves beside his parent's house, so they are on the same site, but eat and sleep separately. At least the adobe walls and the ceramic tile roof has been up for five years; but Susana laughs, wondering when they will have enough money to finish putting in windows, doors, and a cement floor. They only inherited a couple of *cuerdas* each of land; thus they have used some of their earnings to purchase some more land. Susana is adamant that not all of the land should be put in her husband's name; rather she is negotiating with him that they each have title to half of the land. She feels that this arrangement would give her some more security.

> She has struggled with her husband's occasional drinking and liaisons with other women when he is working in other communities. She challenges him and urges that he put more effort and attention into his home and family.

2.2. Challenging the Norm: Independent Single Mothers

There have likely always been single mothers in the community. Presently, however, there are a growing number, perhaps 10% of women within this age grouping; and rather than being absorbed within their patriarchal households of origin, as was the previous fate of single mothers, these young women are challenging the norms of paternity in their culture. These women have had liaisons with men that have ended in pregnancies; however, the men have not taken responsibility for the babies, in many cases refusing to recognize the children as their own. In the case of Raquel, she has three children, from three different fathers. She was married to the last one, but left him because he was abusive and alcoholic. Ruth has two children from two different fathers: the first, a teenage sweetheart while she was in school, and the second, a co-worker who forced her while he was drunk. Tomasa and Ramona each have one child from a short-lived relationship.

These women differ from previous single mothers in the community in their independence and ability to access resources to better their positions. All of these women have returned with their babies to live in the houses of their parents; but they all dream of owning their own homes and land some day, and independently supporting their children. They have borne the criticisms of the community, and overcome the anger of their families, to be accepted as they are. They have also used the legal system, cultural expectations, and family pressure to oblige the fathers of their babies to take varying degrees of responsibility for their children. Tomasa's story exemplifies the struggles of single mothers, although she has access to less education and resources than the other three in the sample:

> Tomasa
>
> Tomasa (23) is a young woman from a very isolated community. She has only four years of formal education; and spent her youth working in her home, traveling to the finca for occasional work contracts of two weeks or one month, and helping her father sell produce he takes to the market in San Pedro.
>
> It was on one of these trips three years ago that she met "Juan," a young man from a neighbouring community in Comitancillo who was also in San Pedro to sell

> produce. They 'talked' before he actually went to ask permission of her father to approach her, so her father was angry when they came to ask permission. He said he would have nothing to do with them. So Juan invited her to come to live at his house. When she became pregnant, Juan left for the *finca;* and threatened that he did not want her to be there when he came back.
>
> She eventually returned to her parent's home, and had the baby there. She struggled through the legal system in Comitancillo and San Marcos, gathering documents and witnesses, to prove that Juan was the father of the child; and have him recognize the boy, and cover some of the expenses for him. She does not think she will ever remarry because she is fearful of how a stepfather would treat her son. So she is working hard to raise money through pig raising, and productive activities; and has dreams of eventually building a house for herself and her son. She is focusing her hopes on her son's future, and wants him to get a good education.

2.3. Juggling Job and Family: Married Career Women

Another small group of women in Comitancillo are following a newly emerging path, representing perhaps 5% of women in this generation. These are young women who have completed secondary vocational training (in this case, all as teachers, the only training available in the community), and are now juggling the demands of a full-time salaried position outside the home with the traditional responsibilities of a Comiteca woman within the household. These women have overcome many obstacles to achieve a professional status; they are among the first few women from Comitancillo to graduate from high school and to become teachers. Family support appears to be a critical factor for women's successful completion of professional education. Until recently, obtaining a teaching position within the national education system involved bribery and internal patronage; and thus the newly graduating teachers from Comitancillo had difficulty gaining access to secure positions. However, in the last few years, the government and the communities established some measures to reduce corruption in the hiring systems, and the official policy of bilingual education for Mayan communities has increased the demand for the bilingual Mam-Spanish teaching graduates from Comitancillo. The several dozen young female teachers from Comitancillo are now renegotiating traditional roles and relationships within the household as their lives outside the household change. Their access and awareness to ideas and developments in the wider world puts them at the leading edge of changes in thinking among Comiteca women regarding gender roles, ethnic identity, and social justice. Rosa is a striking example of the transformation from indigenous peasant girl to a "modern" woman, juggling career and family:

> Rosa
>
> Rosa (28) also grew up in a large family in an *aldea* quite far from the town centre. She was one of the younger children in the family; and through the support of her older brother and mother, she managed to overcome all the barriers to education, and completed her grade twelve teachers' diploma at the local high school.
>
> While in her last years of school she met Ramón, and they began to court. Although the courtship was without parental consent, and was quite stormy, they eventually married. They both now have teaching jobs; his is in a nearby *aldea* and hers is in Tacaná, another municipality, about a three-hour bus trip away. They have two small children. Rosa takes the children with her when she goes to Tacaná for the week of teaching. She carries them the last hour's walk to the isolated community in which she works. While she teaches she hires a young local girl to look after the children for her. She lives in the small room attached to the school during the week. On weekends she travels back to Comitancillo with the children. They stay with her husband in several rooms they rent in town.
>
> They do not have any land yet; neither has received any inheritance, and they do not cultivate *milpa*. Ramón is studying on Saturdays at the university in Quetzaltenango. Rosa is proud of her educational achievements, her ability to earn an income, and not being dependent on her husband. She and her husband are part of a group of young people in the community who are actively working to strengthen Mam and Mayan cultural awareness and pride. She also feels strongly about the position of women in her community; and on a personal level, feels and struggles with the contradictions and tensions in her own relationship with her husband.

2.4. Choosing Singleness: Unmarried Working Women

Another completely "new breed" of women are those that have, for whatever reason, chosen to remain single and make a distinctive life for themselves (perhaps 10% of this generation of young women). They are very aware of the detrimental effects of marriage on women's independence and the hardships an unmarried woman will face. Some of them have turned down male interest, and others have never had the opportunity. All of them are determined, inquisitive, energetic, and self-reliant young women who likely would not fit well into a traditional marriage relationship. They enjoy the freedom they have to travel in the region and nation, to initiate new endeavours, and to pursue their educational aspirations. They have achieved considerable personal success maintaining themselves financially, and assisting their elderly parents. They bear the criticism and lack of understanding from community members for their atypical lifestyles, particularly since marriage is the established passage into adulthood, and therefore older unmarried women are placed in an ambiguous position: neither entirely children or entirely adults. Their relationships to other members of their families and households are often unclear because the usual patterns do not fit. At the same time, they have concerns about land security, caring for their aging parents, and ultimately being alone in their old age; concerns that would normally be taken care of in a traditional marriage arrangement. The dynamism of these single young women comes through in Roberta's story:

> ### Roberta
>
> Roberta (30) comes from a large, poor family in an isolated *aldea*. She received only four years of schooling as a child. But she was very bright and eager to learn; thus after several years of working at home and at the *finca*, she defied the discouragement of her father and brothers, and began to study through radio correspondence. She successfully completed grade nine in this way.
>
> She also became involved in several community women's groups working on cultural and educational projects. Eventually she was chosen to participate in a government-sponsored yearlong training program in San Marcos to learn footloom weaving. While living in the dormitory far from home, she struggled to adapt; and did a myriad of small activities to earn some spending money. She worked in a local home doing laundry; and started a small vending service, purchasing snacks and toiletries in the market, and selling them to the other girls in the dormitory. When she returned to Comitancillo she worked with the women's group and with a local NGO, and with the government literacy program.
>
> Eventually she got a job as a teacher in the neighbouring municipality of San Miquel, in which there was an acute teacher shortage. In this program the government hires people who are not completely qualified teachers (she has only grade nine as opposed to grade twelve), at lower wages. She enjoys the work; but it is very distant from her home, and she gets home only every two or three weeks.
>
> She has always discouraged young men interested in her, because she thinks that most men are irresponsible. She sees how other women live after they are married, the hardships and burdens they face; and she says she will not marry until she finds a man who meets her expectations. There are some tensions and jealousies within her family, concerning her freedoms, responsibilities, and inheritance. She is the last child at home, and is largely responsible to support her parents. She worries sometimes about the future, where she will live if her siblings do not allow her to keep the home site; and if she has no children, who will care for her when she is elderly.

2.5. Facing the Future: Teenage Girls

Two teenage women, Veronica, aged 19, and Victoria, aged 17, offer a glimpse of contrasting, diverse futures and a growing socio-economic gap between young women, depending on opportunities, access to resources, family support, and individuality. Veronica, from a remote community and with little education and local opportunities, uses domestic work in the capital city as a route out of the community to personal satisfaction and independence, however temporary and exploitive. Victoria's central location, steady parental support, and access to resources enable her to utilize education as her means to personal development and independence. The lives of these two young women illustrate the growing socio-economic stratifications that are emerging within the community, and the increasing disparity between the small minority of teenage girls who are positioned to take advantage of the new opportunities, and the majority of teenagers who are increasingly left behind.

Veronica

Veronica (19) is from a very isolated *aldea*, has only has three years of schooling, and spent much time as a younger teenager working on the *finca*. Several years ago she decided she wanted a more glamourous life with more spending money of her own, particularly for clothes. She got a job as a domestic servant in Guatemala City, with the help of a cousin who was already working there. She works six days a week doing cooking, cleaning, childcare, and laundry for a family of five. She lives in a small room at the back of the house, and is virtually "on-call" 24-hours a day. Fortunately, the family she works for is not physically or verbally abusive, although this is not uncommon. She earns Q500 (about $100 Can) per month, an average wage for domestic work.

On Sundays she goes to the Central Plaza of the city to met other domestics from all over the country who meet to chat, eat ice-cream, look in the shops, and visit with young men, also migrant workers from the rural areas. Once every three or four months, she makes the nine-hour bus journey to Comitancillo to visit her parents and bring them a portion of her earnings.

She enjoys the constant action of urban life compared to the quiet monotony of her remote mountain home, and she takes pleasure in her ability to earn money and assist her family. She purchases the latest *cortes* and *huilpiles* in styles from all over the country; and unlike many of the rural teenagers, she wears sandals, jewelry, and a variety of trinkets in her hair.

Her only concern is to be careful about the young men she associates with on her days off. She has seen many young women in the city become pregnant; and end up returning to their home villages with an infant and no paternal support, or living a difficult life as a domestic with a child to raise on the side. Veronica expects to marry eventually and settle in Comitancillo again, but in the meantime she is enjoying her life of independence and new experiences.

Victoria

Victoria (17) is the eldest daughter in a large family that lives within a 20-minute walk of the town centre. She is in grade eleven at the local secondary school, and expects to graduate with a teaching diploma in one more year. She works on the weekends in the town bakery to earn money for her tuition. She loves school: her classmates, the activities, the sports, special events, and even the late night group sessions to complete heavy assignments. When she has to stay at home helping her mother and caring for her younger siblings because there is no school, she finds it very boring. She is inquisitive; and enjoys discussing issues concerning youth, ethnic identity, and the future. She is wary of boys, after several attempted friendships; and has currently decided to forego further relationships until she is finished school. After graduation she plans to work as a teacher and possibly continue studying at university on the weekends in Quetzaltenango. Her parents are very supportive of her studies, proud of her achievements, and have high expectations for her future.

3. Childhood and Education

3.1. The Significance of Schooling for Girls

Clearly education has become an essential factor in the lives of women in Comitancillo; in many ways a woman's work and family opportunities, future security, self-reliance, and self-determination now hinge on education. The overall average number of years of schooling has jumped dramatically in this generation as compared to the previous generations: the present average is seven years, while in the mothers' generation there was an average of one year of schooling, and in the grandmothers' generation, girls had no formal education at all. However, the statistical average hides the large disparity that exists between those who have had educational opportunities and those that continue to be blocked by inaccessibility, poverty, and traditional attitudes towards the education of girls. As mentioned above, this sample is not representative of the actual educational achievements of women in Comitancillo; however, it does demonstrate the range that exists. Six of the women received less than three years of formal schooling as girls, four reached between fourth and sixth grade, and three between seventh and ninth grade. The overall average number of years of schooling for women under the age of 20 in the Municipality is between four and five years. Boys are still more likely to have more education than girls: in grades four through six only 25% of students are girls in the rural schools (Feliciano 1996:138). The five young women in this study who have completed all or some of their secondary education (grades ten to twelve) are actually part of a small, but slowly increasing, minority. There are only approximately 250 Comitecos who have completed secondary school out of a total municipal population of 50,000.

The reasons behind the continued low education levels are the same as those identified by women of the previous generations:

> A long time ago, my father made a rule that he would give the boys each up to sixth grade and the girls only up to second grade...Because they said that you shouldn't give education to women because soon they will marry, and the education won't serve for anything; they will just be in the house making food, raising children, and doing all the work.
>
> For this reason, he did not give me the opportunity to study for many years. I wanted to; but since he made the rule, I couldn't go any further. But now I am seeing changes in the family. Now he is more convinced to give more education to my little sisters. But before he never supported us older girls. – Violeta, 28

> My father did not give me more than grade 7; he wouldn't help me with money. I heard that Ruth is studying in secondary already. Sometimes I lament the fact that I didn't continue studying. But maybe it's not my fault, it's my father that didn't help. – Sandra, 21

For some girls, the existing education system did not meet their needs nor whet their interest. While Tomasa now recognizes that literacy skills would facilitate her interest in improved animal husbandry and agriculture, when she had the opportunity to study as a girl, the schooling seemed irrelevant.

> Maybe for lack of interest, I quit studying. I saw that my sisters didn't go to school. I think I was 14 years old when I quit school. My father wanted me to continue studying, but I said that my older sisters didn't so why should I? I want to learn to work like you work, I told my parents. So my father said that was all right...Sometimes I see the women that were my classmates, and they have continued on to higher grades, and I remember that my father wanted me to study. But the truth is that I myself didn't want to continue. I didn't pass every grade. I think that it is my own fault. I sometimes wonder why I didn't continue. Sometimes the women's group offers opportunities to go to workshops, but how can I go? I don't understand much Spanish, and I can't write very well. When I quit school at age 14, I completely left the pencil behind. Now I have almost forgotten how to read and write. And now I have a child, so how can I continue studying. Better I just work. – Tomasa, 23, single mother

Violeta's younger thirteen-year-old sister, Regina, is still in grade two after five years attending school. Although Violeta continues to encourage Regina and help her purchase school supplies, their parents have given up on her. Regina's failure to succeed in school is peculiar because she appears to be a very bright and creative girl. She has several old Barbie dolls that she has dressed in Mayan clothing and she has created a doll-size Mayan kitchen and house for them, the most creative make-believe play I have ever seen in Comitancillo. Yet rather than questioning the educational methods or content, Comitecos generally understand educational failure as an indication that the individual is not destined for a life that includes or requires education. Observations like the following are common: "Her food won't come from the school; she is made for making food for the pigs" or "he is made for working the soil."

Women's recognition of the necessity and desirability of more education is evident in the large number of women that returned to school as adults. Five of the women in this group completed an additional three to five years in Adult Education classes or via correspondence courses. One of the women (Violeta) only received grade two as a child, but went on to complete ten years as an adult to graduate eventually with a teacher's diploma. She describes her motivation to study as follows:

> When I was 18 years old I decided to return to school [she had grade two]. I thought that with studies I could achieve different things, and that my life could change from the life I was living that did not have any purpose. I did not want to marry or anything because in truth I saw that many of the young women suffered a lot when they got married and had no education. On the other hand, a woman that has an education can defend herself in any circumstances in her life. – Violeta, 28

Ruth, a very bright single mother, was prompted to continue her education because she wanted to secure a better job with which to support herself and her children.

> I decided to continue studying [she had grade seven], after I finished working at AMMID [the local NGO] because many institutions contacted me to work for them. But another person advised me: "No, Ruth, don't keep on working for just Q700 or Q800; improve your education and get a diploma. Now you are doing a double workday, and your children are abandoned. It's okay if you think of getting married, but if you don't, then you need to change. In the future you won't be able to get a job just with a Junior High education, you will need a secondary diploma. So it's worth the effort to continue your studies." -Ruth, 28, single mother of two

It is important to note that the reasonably good job market in the region for young educated women is unique when compared to the other parts of Latin America where neo-liberal socio-economic policies are currently resulting in severe cut backs in government, educational, and social services funding (Connelly et al. 2002:74-75; Deere et al. 1997). The unusual situation in Comitancillo, and apparently highland Guatemala in general, appears to be the result of the particular socio-political moment in Guatemalan history. Since the Peace Accords of 1996, there has been higher levels of funding to development work, particularly in rural communities of Guatemala, and there has been an initiative to establish bilingual education throughout the country. Thus there are currently many positions available in international and national NGOs, in government agencies, and in the educational system. Comitancillo is also advantageously positioned because it had the first secondary institution in the San Marcos highlands to provide teacher training (established in 1986), and thus Comiteco bilingual (Mam-Spanish) teachers are presently filling positions throughout the Mam region. This is dramatically evident in the shift in the composition of teachers within Comitancillo itself; in 1992, 43% of the teachers in the municipality were bilingual, and by 1999, over 80% of all teachers were bilingual.[1] However, the current positive employment market for educated young Maya may be a temporary situation that is a result of the convergence of external and internal factors in this specific time and place, and thus this situation may be relatively temporary.

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[1] Educational data obtained from the *Coordinación Administrativa de Educación Sectorial,* Comitancillo.

3.2. Girls' Labour: Still Essential to the Household Economy

Aside from the greater emphasis on schooling and almost complete absence of sheep herding and pottery production, the childhoods of the youngest generation of women closely resemble those of their mothers and grandmothers. The domestic responsibilities of young Comiteca girls continue to be the same: caring for younger siblings, assisting with food preparation, feeding the animals, gathering firewood, and carrying water. However, unlike their mothers and grandmothers, the girls today must fit their domestic work around school attendance; and this necessity often means that girls can allocate less time to domestic work than in previous generations.

Several of these women had unusually heavy responsibilities within the household at a young age. Two of the women (Ruth, Reina) had to leave school at a young age (twelve and seven years of age respectively) to take full responsibility in the household when their mothers were bedridden because of serious illness for several years. At age ten, Teresa was left responsible for her younger sisters for a several weeks at a time while her parents went to work on the *finca*. Women frequently comment on their observation that girls are saddled with more responsibility at a younger age than boys.

Almost all of the women (15/18) worked on the *fincas* for several weeks or months every year, when they were children. Often after the age of ten years, girls were withdrawn from school permanently, and they began to contribute to the household economy through semi-permanent labour on the plantations. Entire family units would travel to work, possibly leaving behind the elderly and the youngest family members. The only women that did not experience *finca* work as children were from more prosperous families (a vendor's daughter), or lived near the town centre and thus had more wage labour opportunities (Rebeca, Victoria).

> We would go to the *finca* to cut coffee, and then come back here for a while, and then we would go again. Every year we would go to the harvest. We would be at home for

> several months, and then in September we would go again. We would go to the Tumbador region, to a *finca* named La Soledad. – Sofia, 28

Although transportation to the *fincas* has improved, working and living conditions have not improved significantly in the past two decades. In this passage Violeta describes work on a cotton plantation in the 1980s:

> In that time I suffered a lot, because I did not know how to defend myself. It is very difficult to live there...There was no water to wash clothes or bath. I can't forget when my father took us to work at a cotton plantation. We suffered hunger because there was not much food. We had to leave at three in the morning every day to walk about an hour to the place where we had to cut cotton. When we arrived we had to eat breakfast at four in the morning; who can eat at that hour? Half asleep, I ate a bit of food. Just beans and tortillas, but just old, reheated tortillas, and half-raw beans...Then we would go to work. It is very hot, and we had to cut the cotton and put it in sacks. But it is very difficult because the plant has thorns; how our hands were scratched. We had lunch at about one or two in the afternoon. We returned at five in the afternoon...then my sister and I had to cook the maize and prepare the food for the next day. –Violeta, 28

3.3. The Decline of Artisan Skills among Girls

Learning female artisan skills, such as weaving and pottery-making, was one of the most important tasks of girlhood in Comitancillo until a generation ago. Yet in this sample, only one of the women in the youngest generation learned a traditional craft as a girl.

> Well, when I was a girl I was dedicated to herding the sheep, and then little by little I learned to weave *fajas* on the backstrap loom. So then when I sent to herd sheep I would weave *fajas* under the shade of the trees, while I pastured the sheep. –Rosa María, 30

Rosa María is the only one in this sample who herded sheep and learned to weave as a girl; both activities are rapidly disappearing from girls' lives in this municipality. She is from one of the most remote, higher-altitude communities and this may be the reason that the shift to an emphasis on childhood schooling had not yet occurred in her household of origin.

Clearly, learning a craft is no longer the indispensable component of a girl's upbringing that it was in previous generations. While commercialization has made weaving a potentially useful and profitable talent, girls are no longer taught weaving based on the necessity to supply household textile needs. Some girls learn basic weaving skills when they are young, and later in life develop the skill specifically for commercial purposes. In contrast, pottery making has almost completely disappeared as a valuable female skill. At this point, no young Comiteca women are learning the art of pottery production; and within the next generation this skill will likely disappear entirely.

4. Land, Inheritance, and Residency: Continuity and Change

Inheritance of land for all children (although often with a gender bias) and patrilocal residency patterns continue to be the norm in Comitancillo among the youngest generation. Land plot sizes continue to shrink from one generation to the next; the average land holding of the families of origin of the women in this sample is now around 10-20 *cuerdas*.

Ownership of land continues to be a source of security for Comitecos, particularly women. Half (9/18) of the young women in this sample already have some land in their own names, while the other nine have not yet received any land inheritance from their parents. The married women (four) have all received their inheritance, and hold this land in their own names. All of the single mothers (four in total) currently live in their fathers' households, and only one of them has received a land title. That exception is Ruth, whose father has died, and who lives in the house with her mother and unmarried sister. The five single career women and the two teenagers have not yet inherited any land, but in all cases it appears likely that this will eventually occur.

For the most part, the amount of land inherited varies according to location in the Municipality. In the fertile, valley-bottom *aldeas*, such as Chicajalaj and Ixmoco, the average inheritance is two or three *cuerdas,* while in the higher-altitude, more distant *aldeas*, such as San Isidro and Chamaque, plots range from seven to ten *cuerdas*

Customarily the youngest son inherits the house, because he will marry, continue to live in the house, and care for the aging parents. However, this standard procedure is occasionally being modified as Comiteco vocations and life paths change. In the case of Ruth, she cared for her ailing father when he was sick and dying, both physically and financially; and now she is caring for her elderly mother.

> It is the custom that the youngest son stays in the house, but we are not all the same. The wife of my brother did not want to be here anymore because we [the other siblings] were still all here with my father. So for her it was better that they lived in a separate house. So she no longer wanted to be here. My father said to them that it was their decision, and that they could go if they wanted.

> So for the moment we don't know [who will stay with the house], although my deceased father told my older brother and my aunts that I could stay in it because of the length of time I was with my parents. When my father got sick, then it was I that cared for him and paid for the expenses. So then my father said, "She will stay with the house." ...My father wanted to make a document [a will or land title] but I didn't want to because I didn't want to have problems with my brothers. Better I thought, that the solution is, if both my parents die, then my brothers can decide if I get the house or not. So that's the way it's going to be. My brothers tell me that I am still with our mother, and that I care for her during the rest of her life, and then I will have the house. Everyone already has land. So no one is going to remove me from the house, they say. The only thing we want is that you care for our mother and that you don't leave the house alone. - Ruth, 28, single mother

In this case there are several renegotiations outside the norm. Ruth's sister-in-law decided, and persuaded her husband and father-in-law, that she did not want to live in the patriarchal house, even though she and her husband would eventually be the owners and heads of the household. She preferred the privacy and peace of a separate household for her immediate family. With the youngest son gone, there was a vacancy to be filled. The land had been divided up between the siblings earlier, and thus only the house was still in question. Everyone seems to agree that by caring for her dying father and her elderly mother, Ruth is fulfilling the role of the youngest son, to care for his parents; and thus she earns the right to inherit the house.

However, negotiating property inheritance when the usual customs do not fit is not always so amiable. In Roberta's case, the situation is complicated by jealousies between siblings as they work out responsibility for the care of their aging parents.

> My brothers and sisters are fighting because I am living together with my parents. "For sure she is going to get the house. She is the one that cares for them, so we do not get the opportunity to take any responsibility for them [and thus have no claim for the house]." I talk with my siblings: "Why are you fighting about me? What have I done? I am only helping Mama and Papa; they are still working. We have to see how we can all share responsibility for them. Not just one person. I can't do it well because I am a single woman. If I get sick, who will care for mama? Anyway, we are all responsible. If you want my land, then ask Papa for it, and take it. What can I do with the land?" But my mama says, that it is better if they give me my part of the inheritance later. They have only given to the ones who are married now. Maybe I can care for them somewhat, but not totally because I am a single woman. If I had a husband who went to work, and I cared for the house, I would have my work at home and would care for my mother. She could collect firewood or take care of the sheep [traditional work of elderly women]. But my brothers and sisters are always fighting. - Roberta, 30

Although she is the last unmarried child, and she is earning money as a teacher and caring for her parents whenever she is home, she is in an uncertain position in terms of her land inheritance, and the ownership of the house itself is in question.

5. Economic Strategies

5.1. Growing Disparity in the Agricultural Base

While all of these women combine a variety of economic activities, *milpa* plots and animal husbandry continue to be the underpinning in all these household economies. All of the households cultivate at least two or three *cuerdas* of *milpa*. Several have been involved in projects to promote family gardens that provide more vegetables for the household diet. A greater distinction has emerged between those who have *milpa* but who are largely dependent on other sources of income, and those that have begun to commercialize their agricultural production. In the first group are those with steady wage labour, such as the teachers and large-volume weavers; for these people *milpa* is like an "insurance policy" and a continued link to their place and identity. The second group has moved into improved farming techniques and increasing cash cropping. For example, Violeta's family and Teresa's family produce vegetables for export companies, and Roberta's family has improved their orchards for greater fruit production.

All of the women have some poultry; chickens continue to be a small "savings account" for women when they need cash. Here Roberta describes how her mother taught her to start raising chickens as one of a woman's most accessible and secure ways of earning some cash.

> When I was a teenager, I didn't have any idea about money, but I wanted some for better clothes. So I asked my mother what I could do. I wanted to buy some baby chicks. "That's good, my daughter; I like that, it's a good idea," said my mother. In this way she oriented me. My father does not think about anyone's [individual needs]; doesn't notice if one is suffering. But my mother is different. So she gave me Q3 to buy two small chickens. I just saved the money that I earned when these chickens grew, and bought more. – Roberta, 30

Several women (Tomasa, Rosaura) have focused their efforts on agricultural survival strategies, and find great satisfaction in improving their productive capacities and skills. Both of these women are without husbands (one widowed, the other a single mother), and they are fulfilling the dual roles of male and female in peasant agriculture.

5.2. Increased Commercialization of Craft Production

Within this generation of women, craft production has shifted from being simple home-based production for household consumption and local sale to becoming more commercialized.

As in agriculture, a gap has emerged between those who produce for strictly internal use and because it is part of their lives as Comitecos, and those who have begun to specialize in craft production in the cash economy.

For most of these women, collective production continues to be the only way they can access the resources and markets needed to increase the quality and profitability of their home-based production. Many of these women did not learn to weave as children because clothing is no longer produced at home; however, now as adults they participate in groups to learn this art that has become one of the few entrances for Maya into national and global markets. Indigenous textile craft production has become a large and successful export sector and income generator for many Mayan communities.

Collective craft production is not only a viable and potentially profitable activity for women; it has significant social side benefits that are changing women's perceptions and positions. Tomasa eloquently describes the new world of ideas and possibilities that opens up when women are able to meet and learn together.

> For me it is important that we as women study, and unite together to do work. I think that in that way we are not closed in, we are not closed off from new knowledge. We were closed in before. When we unite in a group to do work, we learn something. On the other hand if we don't go to a group, if we don't unite, a person alone cannot have an idea, cannot have knowledge, because she is closed off. Who will tell you anything if you are closed in the kitchen or with the animals? As if animals have an idea! They don't! The kitchen cannot tell you anything. You need to go; if you go to workshops or to group meetings, you learn something about what you can do. For this reason I participate and I learn. – Tomasa, 23

Many women mentioned the criticism they endure when they participate in group meetings and activities. Some people accuse them of looking for husbands or other men, of not having enough to do in the household, of wasting time, of getting secret payoffs, and of inappropriate behaviour.

> My parents were against [my participation]. Why are you going? They asked me. When you come back you come empty-handed, without a cent...But I liked the courses that they gave us because they talked about the Mayan people, about history, and also we got training about growing and using medicinal plants...The neighbours would say that those women go there to look for husbands. As if you would ever be a teacher. But we endured everything they said. It's not as if those people [who criticized us] were paying us, or maintaining us. Let them talk. –Roberta, 30

> There are times when we have meetings in the *aldea*, and there are men that say: those women have nothing to do in their houses, they should be hoeing the fields with their

> husbands. But we just go ahead and have our meeting. We are accustomed to having our meetings, and if you miss a meeting, you feel sad. If one walks to the hill in the afternoon, it is wonderful to hear all the things, and learn useful things. – Sofia, 28 [speaking about their group that is doing weaving, embroidery, and operating a loan fund for women raising pigs]

However, as the activities of these groups have begun to show results in concrete monetary ways as well as less tangible ways such as improved family health and wellness, opinion in the community is slowly turning. Increasingly community members recognized the value of these group activities.

Within the sample of young women interviewed in this study, two of them have successfully moved into commercial textile production outside of the collective organization. Ramona was sponsored by a local women's group to participate in a one-year weaving course at a large artisan cooperative in Quetzaltenango. When she returned to the community, she worked for one year free of charge, training the women in her community. Although she continues to participate in the group on an occasional basis, she has now begun producing textiles on her own for a larger artisan cooperative that sell products internationally. They provide the materials; she weaves the requested cloth, and then turns the cloth over to them for export. The advantage she had was that her father was formerly a weaver, and he encouraged her to learn and supported her purchase of a large footloom. He has since purchased two more looms, and has set the whole family to work. Reina also attended the one-year training in Quetzaltenango; however, she has been unable to establish herself as an independent weaver. She has been plagued by illness, and has been frustrated by her family's extreme poverty that does not seem to allow her to procure a loom to work on.

The only other woman who has established significant commercial production on an individual basis is Rebeca. Again, she learned her skills in a group situation; she was part of an original group that purchased sewing machines and learned to do machine-embroidered blouses. She was able to strike out on her own because she married into one of the most prosperous families in town, the owners of several shops. Her industrious parents-in-law purchased a sewing machine for her, and encouraged her to produce blouses in the time she has after returning from teaching school.

These cases suggest that to establish an independent/individual production of commercial textiles is only possible with there are other supports available, such as a supportive family and access to capital resources. Without these things, women have little chance of overcoming the obstacles of poverty and the daily survival necessities that prevent growth into more lucrative productive spheres. This is specific space in which community-based and external organizations can play a key role in assisting women without independent access to resources and training to move beyond household-level craft-making into commercial production.

5.3. The Constancy of Domestic Work

Domestic work continues to be the sole domain of women. While technological innovations, such as grinding mills, water systems, electricity, and improved wood burning stoves have lightened the women's load somewhat and decreased the amount of time dedicated to housework, it continues to be a burdensome, unavoidable, and undervalued part of their daily responsibilities. Consider the following excerpt:

> A (Interviewer) – What work do you do in the home?
> S (Susana) – Just taking care of the family. I don't have any other work.
> A – Well... "just" means cooking, washing clothes...?
> S – [laughing]...bathing the children, feeding the animals, cleaning the house...that's my work every day!
> A – I think it must fill up every day.
> S – Of course!
> A – What work does your husband do?
> S – Well, he just...comes home from teaching, and then just does his paperwork, that's all.
>
> -Susana, 27, married mother of five

Sofia feels the inequities of women shouldering the sole responsibility for the domestic work:

> They say that all over Guatemala women have fewer rights than men. Men have their work, and women are at home with much more work. As they say, the woman is the first to get up, so that she can make the breakfast for the man so he can go to do his work, and she is the last to go to bed because she has to cook, wash, and clean, and so on, until very late at night she has to work. – Sofia, 28

Women and men in Comitancillo estimate that an average male workday is 12 hours long, while a woman's is 17 hours long, the difference largely created by women's heavier domestic responsibilities (Wiebe 1997:167). Despite women's (and men's) awareness of the gender imbalance in the length and daily burdens of the workday, there are no indications of gender renegotiation in this arena.

5.3. Variations in Household Money Management

The manner in which money is managed within the household chiefly depends on who earns it, and the composition of the household. In the case of married couples, in which the largest cash income comes from the husband, women have less involvement in the flow of money. Sandra's teacher husband manages the money in their household; and the small amount she earns as a literacy instructor, she turns over to him. Sofia's husband, also a teacher, manages the household finances, including paying off a loan for his education. Their husbands give them money on market days to purchase food for the week, and clothes as necessary. According to Susana, this dependence on men for money can be a source of difficulties and anxiety for women:

> There are some couples in which the woman has no money for expenses. Life is very difficult because these women don't have a man who provides money for expenses, and they have children. One can't live like that. It hasn't happened in my life like that: my husband has always given me expense money...If it should happen to me [that my husband didn't give me money] it would be terrible. But I am thinking and I have said to my husband, if you don't provide for us, you can stay by yourself with the children, and I will go. As if there aren't places to live where one can live without problems. –Susana, 28

Greater female control of cash resources is apparent among the single mothers, and single, working women. All of these women currently live in their father's households, as is expected; however, they do not automatically transfer their cash income to their fathers to manage, as is traditional. These women largely control their own money to meet their own and their children's needs, as well as contributing to the larger household expenses.

A radical departure from traditional male management of cash resources is evident in cases in which both the husband and wife are earning a salary. All three of the women in this situation (Rebeca, Silvia, Rosa) indicated that together with their husbands they planned the family budget, determining what money went towards paying debts, into the purchase of land or initiation of a business, and into household expenses. Increased female control of cash income is directly associated with increased education and generation of cash income. Clearly, women who do not have opportunities to generate cash income, yet are responsible for family sustenance in an increasingly cash-based economy, are at a disadvantage because of their lack of control over the little income that does flow into the household.

5.5. Migratory Labour: Old and New Destinations

Comitecos began seasonal labour migrations to the coastal plantations at the end of the nineteenth century, and now two new labour destinations have appeared at the end of the twentieth century. Since the 1980s some young Comiteca women have migrated for short periods (one to five years) to the urban centres to work as domestic servants. Like Veronica, whose story was related at the beginning of the chapter, young unmarried women see this type of work as an opportunity to earn some personal cash and contribute economically to their parent's household. Domestic positions such as this are fairly easy to acquire, often through kin or friends already working in the city. The women usually live in the homes of their employers, often middle and upper class Ladino families, working extended hours for a wage of $100 to $200 Canadian a month. Typically they have Sundays off, and hundreds of these young women can be seen strolling the central plaza in the capital city on Sunday afternoons. They also frequently make a trip to their highland home communities every few months to visit their families and bring money and gifts. Over half (11/18) of the women in this sample have spent at least a year doing this type of work; and as Raquel describes, it is not easy:

> In the capital one suffers, because one is closed inside someone's house. The work is from five in the morning until ten at night, non-stop. You may get a break, but inside the house. I suffered a lot because I worked for a Mexican woman with her husband and two children. I was all alone; and I had to take care of the children, cook, and wash and iron the clothes. I had to do almost everything. My God, when did I get to sleep? My back ached from the work. So I told the lady that I was going to go home because I felt very tired because of all the work, and it was a very big house. But then she raised my salary a bit and I stayed another six months. – Raquel, 30

In addition to heavy workloads and long days, the women face the possibility of physical, sexual, and labour abuses. For example, Violeta worked for an employer who did not pay her for four months because he did not want her to leave. The young women also confront the risks of being essentially alone in a large city, far from the community and family structures that usually regulate their behaviour at home. For example, it is not uncommon for young women to return home pregnant after a liaison with another rural migrant in the city. Sofia returned home with a baby after working for two years in the capital city, and has no knowledge of the whereabouts of the father of the baby. Violeta's two sisters and Olívia's daughter also became pregnant while working in the city; and as Olívia describes it: "There is no father in sight!"

In the last decade of the century, a new, more lucrative, and more dangerous destination for migratory labour has emerged: the United States. The flow of Guatemalans to the United States began early in the 1980s as people sought refuge from the violence of the Guatemalan government's counter-insurgency campaign. A continuous flow of migrants escaping economic, ethnic, and political oppression continues until the present. In the mid-1990s there were an estimated 100,000 Mayan people in the United States, and hundreds more arriving each week (Wellmeier 1998:47).

Despite the lengthy history of Guatemalan migration to the United States, migration from the municipality of Comitancillo is a relatively recent phenomenon, beginning only about five years ago. At present, there is a small but increasing number of Comiteco men working illegally in the United States (possibly 100 men out of a population of 50,000); only a handful of women have migrated. International migration is a complex process for women, largely because it conflicts with the traditional roles of women as the primary caregivers and reproducers of culture, and moves them outside the jurisdiction and protection of the cultural community. At this point, the only women to consider international migration seriously are single mothers who have no other economic survival options.

An additional barrier to female migration is the fact that few women can amass the large amount of money required to finance such a migration. Currently, a migrant must pay between $3000 to $7000 Canadian to a *coyote* (contractor/guide) to cover the cost of transportation, documentation, and bribes. This price is no guarantee that the immigrant will not be caught by Mexican or American authorities during the journey, jailed, fined, and deported back to Guatemala. Because of the clandestine nature of the journey, it can be very arduous and dangerous for the illegal migrants, as they cross uninhabited deserts and deep rivers, travel in small vessels in the open sea, or move underground in tunnels and pipes.

For the women that stay behind, the impact of male migration to the United States is much the same as it was when men were migrating to the *fincas* and public works projects in the earlier part of the century. Women must shoulder the double burden of economically and domestically sustaining the family on existing subsistence resources, and repay any debts incurred in the migration. Often men who are in the United States for extended periods of time will establish a second family there; alternatively, women left behind in Guatemala are expected to remain faithful to their distant husbands in order to have a legitimate right to the remittances he sends. For many Guatemalans, sacrifice of the years of separation and the double burden women bear is mitigated by the potential to raise the family from subsistence survival to a higher, more secure standard of living. In other municipalities of the highlands in which international migration has been occurring for over a decade already (e.g., Rio Blanco, a neighbouring municipality), a frequent pattern is for men to work three to ten years in the United States, accumulate capital, and return to Guatemala to establish a small business, buy more land, and/or build a superior house for the family.

Among the women interviewed in this study, several had sons in the United States (Alicia, Manuela); but none had husbands who had emigrated. Only two of the women, both single mothers, were seriously considering migration to the United States.

Ana María described the multitude of factors that a woman, particularly a single mother, must consider when thinking about migrating to find work. Distance, length of time, and the potential income are balanced when contemplating migratory labour options. Her elder brother was influential in discussing the possibilities with her. He told her that going to the *finca* was acceptable because it was only for one month at a time, and her young children could stay with their grandmother. On the other hand, working in the capital city as a domestic servant was not an acceptable option because it would mean leaving her children behind for many months at a time. In contrast, the potentially large earnings possible in the United States more than compensated for the fact that migrating to the United States would result in at least several years of separation from her children. However, thus far Ana María has decided to remain in Comitancillo; she is hopeful that with a combination of textile production and *finca* labour she will be able to sustain her sons and eventually build her own house. As long as she has some reasonable economic options available to her in the community, she will not take the drastic step of international migration.

Raquel has done more than consider the positives and negatives of international migration; she actually began the journey north.

> I never thought of going to the States before, because one didn't hear of it. But then we started hearing more about the States, about how one earns more there, that you work by the hour. So one day I decided that I would go. Then I thought about the possible dangers in the journey, but then I began to think: I have nothing, absolutely nothing. If I had some land, I could sell it to travel. But I have nothing. My father couldn't give me anything either. It costs between Q15,000 and Q30,000 ($3000-$6000 Can) to travel. But I still wanted to go, so I talked to a guide in Tajamulco [the neighbouring municipality], and asked if he could take me without payment in advance. He agreed because he said he would put me in a job, and would come and collect his payment from me there. He said that I could pay him back in one month. I planned to go for five to ten years. – Raquel, 30, single mother of three

Raquel traveled with another single mother from Comitancillo and the contractor as far as the Mexican border; but at that point her companion began to regret her decision to leave her nine-month old baby behind, and decided not to travel to the States. Raquel did not feel confident continuing alone.

> There were two other girls in the group, but they were from El Salvador. I thought to myself: "I don't know what will happen on the road if I go alone. I felt confident to go with the other woman from my community. We talked Mam together. I couldn't continue without her, so I decided to return home. – Raquel, 30

In order to travel undetected across Mexico and into the United States, the young Mayan women must cut their long hair (customarily Mayan women never cut their hair), and change into western clothes. Raquel had pants in her bag that she was going to change into once they crossed the border; and at that time, the contractor was also going to cut her hair. They are also forbidden to speak Mayan languages while in public. Thus, in addition to the sacrifice of separation from family and community, international migration requires that a person eliminate all the outward ethnic markers that are central to the Maya.

Thus international migration is done at great personal cost, and people do it only when they feel they have absolutely no other options. This situation is evident in the story circulating in the community of perhaps one of the very few Comiteca women currently in the United States. Elsa was in an abusive marriage relationship. Although her husband was a teacher, he had a second wife; and refused to support Elsa and her five children. In a desperate measure, she traveled illegally to Los Angeles in January 2000 to live with two of her brothers who are already working there. Elsa's case is particularly unusual because she did not warn anyone of her plans before she disappeared, leaving her children in the home of her parents-in-law. Perhaps she felt that this was the best and only opportunity left for her to fulfill her maternal responsibility towards her children; and that if she failed, they would at least be protected and nurtured within the patriarchal household of their paternal grandfather.

Examination of the experience of international migration and its impact on the Mayan women, men, families, communities, and cultures is beyond the scope of this particular study, however, research on this topic is beginning to emerge (Wellmeier 1998; Burns 1993).

6. Marriage and its Alternatives

As noted earlier, this sample of young Comitecas is not statistically representative of the marital status of young women in general in the community; however, it does illustrate the range of marital choices available to women (Table 7). Approximately 80% of women in Comitancillo between the ages of 18 and 30 are in marriage or common-law relationships, a proportion common throughout the highlands; in contrast, only seven out of 18 women in this sample were in traditional marriage relationships[2]. The remainder of the women interviewed represented other possible marital/single situations: four are unmarried mothers and seven are unmarried women. Discussions with these women explored their perspectives and choices regarding marriage relationships and singleness.

6.1. Shifting Ideals in Courtship and Marriage

As many of the older women commented, traditional courtship practices have all but disappeared in Comitancillo in the last decade. The young man no longer requests permission of a young woman's parents to visit her in the presence of other household members, nor does the elaborate ritual of household exchanges, meals, and prayers of the elders take place. More often now, the young people meet at school or in the community, and initiate a courtship that is completely independent of the household. They meet on the street corners in town and in secluded places along the paths to the *aldeas* to converse, flirt, and get to know potential partners. A young couple will independently decide that they wish to marry, and then inform their parents. Usually couples have a religious marriage ceremony in the church and a legal ceremony in the municipality.

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[2] The term marriage will be used throughout this chapter to indicate couples in civil and/or religious marriages as well as "common-law" relationships based on traditional Mayan customs. However, the majority of young couples now obtain civil marriage certificates.

Both married and unmarried women agreed that the most important characteristic in the ideal husband is that he assume genuine responsibility for the physical needs of the family. While a few of the younger women had some ideas of romantic love and individual compatibility in marriage, for the vast majority the ideal marriage partner is one who fulfills the traditional male role in the rural peasant household. Male responsibility or at least involvement in the maintenance of the family is the most critical key to happiness in marriage and in life in general. Women's concern with male responsibility could be a result of the weakening of "responsible patriarchy" (Maynard 1974) within this Mayan community, and also the increasing weight on women to supply basic family needs while at the same time facing the challenge of less access to cash and material resources.

In this passage, Roberta vividly describes the challenges of women who do not have supportive husbands, and the decline in physical and emotional health.

> There are so many problems with men. What if a woman does not get the money she needs for household expenses. A man spoke to me, and said:" How are you? You are so nice, so pretty." I said, "Do you think I am pretty? It is because my father takes care of me, he gives me clothes (actually I buy my own clothes, but I just told him that), my father gives me food, he buys me meat, and we have soap to wash our clothes, so I don't have any problems. Maybe for that reason I am pretty."
>
> "But maybe your wife was like that when you met her. But now she is not appealing anymore and so you want another woman. But it is because you did not take your responsibility, for that reason she is no longer appealing. Better that you take care of your woman. If you have a little money, buy her clothes, feed her well, and take care of her well. Don't fight with her; rather buy her the things she needs. Your woman will be very nice, plump. Why are you talking to me when you have a wife in your home? If I went with you, but in your house there is not maize, there is nothing to eat, then I would end up like your woman...Women are pretty, but if they are taken care of." – Roberta, 30

There is a perception among Comiteca women that the Ladino practice of having more than one wife is becoming more common among Mayan men. In this pattern, men who have more than one "wife" and household with children are admired as expressions of superior *machismo*. For many Maya and Ladina women, this practice is accepted as long as the man provides materially for both households. Several of the women describe the importance of a civil marriage because it guarantees certain rights for the first wife; a man cannot push her out of the house, and she has recourse in the legal system if he does not fulfill his responsibilities to sustain his children.

> At first I was reluctant to marry because there could be problems. There are many men now who have two or three women. I could not put up with that. I told Juan that if something like that was going to happen, I did not want to marry him. He said that I shouldn't think that; that he wanted to marry me, and that he did not plan to leave me. - Susana, 27

Susana goes on to describe the advantages of a legal marriage. She notes that if a woman is legally married, the man cannot remove her from the home and replace her with another woman, and he has to take financial responsibility for his children.

> I think it is best for a woman to be married by civil law because it is more security for the woman, even if the man doesn't want to. For example, if suddenly Juan has another wife, and he says to me: "Susana, you do not have the right to be in this house, and the land that we bought is not yours, it's mine. He does not have the right to say that because we have the civil [certificate] and we have children. I will go to the judge and say: Look, sir, my husband says this, but isn't there a law about this? If the judge says there is, then the man, if he doesn't want me anymore will have to leave. –Susana, 27

In addition to an awareness of legal rights, a woman's ability and opportunities to earn money and maintain herself and her children outside the customary marital union and household structure determine whether she can choose to leave an abusive spouse.

> If a woman does not have a profession, she simply has to suffer whatever the man wants to do to her because a woman cannot live easily without a profession. Worse yet if she has five or more children, that woman cannot easily abandon a home; rather she is just dependent on the man. – Violeta, 28

Interestingly, as women gain increasing levels of education and the income security and independence associated with salaried positions, they also begin to have different expectations of their husbands. For example, Rosa worries about her husband leaving her, not because she is worried about how she will survive, but because of her affection towards him.

> I am afraid that one day my husband will decide to leave me, and who will be there for my children and me? I worry more for sentimental reasons, because I am a professional, and so I can have a dignified life and deal with anything that happens. – Rosa, 28

Despite the broadening of women's geographical space in terms of education, activities, and travel, the marriages in Comitancillo continue to be overwhelmingly endogamous. All of the women are married to men from their own *aldeas* or at most from a neighbouring *aldea*. All of the women said that a person could marry anyone they wanted, and that there were no restrictions on whom one married; but the reality is that only internal marriages occur.

In this sample only Raquel was briefly married to an outsider, in her case a man from San Pedro, the department capital. This marriage ended after two years because of his alcoholism and abuse; however, perhaps the perceived differences of ethnicity between the two of them created the most critical marital problems. San Pedranos are descendants of the Mam; however, several generations ago they distanced themselves from the "Indian" identity, and shifted to Spanish as their language. They pride themselves in being very industrious, commercial, and prosperous. As women have described elsewhere, the Comitecos feel that the San Pedranos look down on them as inferior, uneducated Indians. When Raquel, a beautiful, clever Comiteca single mother with two children, married this man from San Pedro, things almost immediately went sour for her. She describes how he and his family constantly made fun of her grammatical mistakes and accent in Spanish, as well as her customs, and the way she did things in the household. Eventually she left him to return to her father's house.

6.2. Single Mothers Contest the Norm

The four young single mothers in this sample are part of a new and growing subdivision of the population. Although there have likely always been children born outside of accepted marital unions, there were far fewer in the past than there are today. There has been a significant increase in the past decade for several reasons.

Today there are more opportunities for young people to meet outside the direct supervision of their elders. As many of the older women commented, young people today do not respect the traditional customs of seeking parental permission to talk, and then doing so in the presence of their elders. Unlike the traditional married women who all married neighbouring men, the women who are single mothers all had relationships with men that they met either while attending school or during work that took them away from home. Ruth has two children; one was fathered by a fellow student when she was 17 years old, and the other by a co-worker when she worked in the local NGO. Tomasa met the young man who fathered her child while selling apples in the San Pedro market for her father. Ramona met the father of her child while working at the local NGO. And Raquel has three children; one is from a young man who went to school with her, and two are from different men she met while working at the local office of the Ministry of Agriculture as an extension worker.

The other factor that has affected the number of single mothers in Comitancillo is the increased independence of young women, and their refusal to accept harmful or unsatisfactory relationships and living situations. When Ruth's first boyfriend found out that she was pregnant, he initially refused to accept this news; but when he did, he wanted her to go live as a domestic with a relative of his in town so he could finish his education without responsibility. Ruth refused, and chose rather to return to live within her parent's household, where she felt she was treated with more respect. Tomasa was abused verbally and physically by her common-law husband, and he left her for several months at a time while he went to the *finca*. Again she preferred to return to her father's house rather than live in this situation. Raquel chose to raise her children alone rather than continue to live with the alcoholic and abusive father of her third child, despite the fact that this was the first time she was in a legitimate marriage relationship with the father of one of her children. Ramona found out that, although the father of her baby had discussed possible marriage with her, he had another woman pregnant at the same time; so she decided to end the relationship with him.

All of these young women returned to live in the households of their parents, despite the fact that they had broken the traditional patrilocal contract. Traditionally, women had the right to return to the protection of a fathers' house after a failed marriage only if they had followed appropriate custom by courting and marrying with the permission and approval of their parents. In all of these cases, the women did not have preliminary parental approval; yet in all of these cases, after their initial anger, the parents accepted their daughters.

> He and I had talked quite a bit before he came to talk to my father. So when he went to my father, my father was mad. He said, I will not take responsibility for that; you two talked first, you shouldn't have talked already. For this reason maybe it was my fault. – Tomasa, 23

After her father's anger that she had not gotten permission before having a relationship, her boyfriend invited her to come to live at his house. When the relationship broke down, she returned to her father's house; and after her father overcame his anger, she was accepted back.

> My parents supported me, but at first my father was very mad, but little by little he thought about it, and later he said: "Well whose fault was it?" Then the father of the baby came to explain who he was. And little by little [my father's] anger passed. - Ramona, 22

Raquel tells a long story of how she initially tried to hide her pregnancy from her parents by tightening her *faja* around her waist, but eventually her father noticed. She was strapped over his knee like a child for this transgression. But eventually, he felt he had no choice but to accept her in the house because otherwise she would be homeless.

Unlike before, these young women are much more aware and confident in accessing the formal judicial and social systems to pursue their legal rights and ensure paternal responsibility. Tomasa, the least educated of the four, took her case all the way to the court in San Marcos with perseverance and conviction:

> So I went to the judge and they called him. I went to charge him for the birth certificate of the boy...He says that the boy is not his. But I insisted to the judge that the baby was his son. I told the judge how many days I was living with him. I had to get four witnesses for the judge in San Marcos. I went to find them to prove that I was speaking the truth. I found them, but one of the four did not want to do it because she was afraid that maybe the [my husband's] family would get angry at her. The witnesses could not be relatives of his or mine. So I found four other people and I guess the judge believed them...This whole process was difficult for me. One has to buy documents, pay a lawyer. But I paid because I want the boy to be recognized by his father, because maybe when he is bigger he will ask for his money and for his land. It is better that I struggle now so that he has a father. So I have done his birth certificate in the name of his father and his mother.
>
> Now I am doing the legal process for my son's expenses, but I haven't finished yet. It is in San Marcos because here in Comitancillo you cannot do it, it has to be with the Judge for Work and Family. It's a lot of trips, but I am presenting my documents and my claims. – Tomasa, 23

The willingness of these young women to utilize the contemporary justice system to achieve their objectives is in sharp contrast to the perceptions of their mothers and grandmothers.

In the earlier chapters, the women of the previous two generations clearly felt that the traditional community justice process was much more efficient and fair than the new Justice of the Peace office and the regional courts in San Marcos. While the young women recognize the problems with the new system (inefficiency, proceedings in a second language and in usually in written form, corruption, and absence of community cultural values), they have realistically assessed their options, and are prepared to work within the existing system for the benefit of their children.

Despite the greater independence of single mothers, the community still frowns on this situation, often blaming the girls' parents. One elderly woman with two unmarried daughters with children emotionally described the ridicule and gossip she faces from the community: "They say, 'What kind of parents do those girls have? Do they not teach them how to behave?' ".

But the surprising thing is that these young women take responsibility for their situations, and thoughtfully consider what they have learned.

> I don't blame the men. I am at fault too. Now I am 30 years old. I am not so stupid that I will throw myself into something again. I am moving ahead. After so many experiences, I am stronger than most other women. –Raquel, 30

All of these young women are very hesitant about the idea of (re)marriage, partly because they are still hurting from their previous disappointing relationships, but also because they fear for the well-being of their children. In this way they think like their grandmothers and mothers.

> I think many things, because I watch people. There are people that have children with one person and then marry another, either a man or a woman. But when they marry, the children are left orphans; they are the ones that suffer. The stepmothers or stepfathers don't like or don't love them like their own children. So now I am thinking that it's better to be alone with my son, because almost nobody can say anything; nobody can bother me...If I marry another man, he will not give education to my son; he'll just send my son to work. - Tomasa, 23

> I think it is difficult that a woman like me with two children will marry. Well, I don't think it would be difficult if the man didn't have a family already. But if the man has a family and his wife has died, or he has been separated from his wife for a time and he has children, then I think there would be problems because the children are not of the same family. - Ruth, 28

These young women are also opening up a new potential life path for women of Comitancillo. All of them look forward to sustaining themselves and their children, building and owning their own home, and a brighter future for their children.

> I don't feel alone. I can stay with my parents. When my father divides up his land [as inheritance to us children] I am going to struggle to get enough money to construct a house with my son. It doesn't matter if it's big or not, I can work, even though I have to pay labourers to work the land. And when I can't work anymore, I will have someone to care for me: my son. My other siblings are married and live separately. When my father is old and can no longer work, I will have to care for him. – Tomasa, 23

> What I think I will do is continue working. I haven't yet asked my father for my land; but I think that I will build a house, even if it is just for my son and me. We would have our own house. That's what I am thinking, but I haven't yet begun to work on it; I don't know if I will be able to do it. –Ramona, 22

6.3. Singleness: A New Option for Women

As mentioned above, several women in this sample have specifically chosen not to marry. They have observed the negative experiences of many married women; and now have the option of surviving outside the institution of marriage, something that was not a possibility even a generation ago. The ability of women to earn their own living is the biggest factor that has enabled women to choose not to marry, or at least to delay marriage.

> [I don't want to marry], I would rather study, because of the experience of my sister. She suffered a lot. When she just got married, the man became jealous, and beat her. So what did she get out of being married? Maybe I'll marry when I have some money, some things, and I have more knowledge. If one marries early, it's not fair. – Roberta, 30

Of course, defying the norm leaves these women open to a range of opinions and criticisms in the community.

> Many people give me advice that it is better for me to stay single: you only have to respond to yourself, you can take care of yourself, you can get a teaching job and work. You can decide for yourself what you buy, having your own money in your hands. You can do many things in the future. But others tell me it is better to marry. There are a lot of different opinions! ...The other criticism is that if you don't marry it's because you don't want to have a man...If you reach the age of 40 without marrying they say "the train left you behind." –Violeta, 28

Roberta describes how other people gossip that she must have had relationships with men when she is working or attending courses outside the community; and that probably she has had abortions or takes birth control pills, both considered completely unacceptable behaviour.

All of these women think about their lives in the future, without the traditional securities of land, house, and adult children to care for them. Many of them hope to build their own houses one day (Violeta, Rosa María, Roberta). Care in old age is a concern for these women. All of them are currently caring for their aging parents; but if they do not have children of their own, the customary caregivers will not be available to them. Rosa María is contemplating adoption of a child as a possible solution to this dilemma. These women are also in an unusual position that the familiar markers of entrance into adulthood (a husband and children) are not present, thus their position within the community is somewhat ambiguous.

7. Emerging Issues in Women's Reproductive Lives

Women's lives continue to be profoundly shaped by their reproductive roles within the household. Fortunately, women's health in pregnancy and childbirth, and infant health are slowly improving in isolated Guatemalan communities. The largest areas of negotiation for women in this area are in the control of reproduction and in the juggling of their traditional nurturing roles with new work responsibilities.

7.1. Reproductive Health

Unlike in previous generations, young women today are much more knowledgeable about sexual and reproductive health. Their grandmothers had little preparation for the onset of menses and the experience of childbirth because the topics were taboo even among women, as described by Joaquina and Josefa (chapter four) and the women of San Pedro Laguna (Paul 1974). In contrast, Victoria describes how this situation has changed among the current generation of women:

> In my case, my mother explained to me that there are those that are afraid of this. When my menstrual period arrived for the first time, my mother told me: "Don't be shocked; this always happens to women. She told me about it beforehand. She said that there were those who start to cry and are afraid, but that this always comes to women. Before women were afraid, but now it is different, because time has advanced. - Victoria, 17

All of the women continue to give birth at home with the support of family and occasionally midwives. All municipalities have government health centres that provide services for pregnant women and infants; however, these are located in the town centres, and not easily accessible for women from the more remote *aldeas*. In addition, these clinics do not have the capability of providing childbirth services. Although there are several physicians who work in the community, they do so on an irregular basis, so childbirth commonly occurs in the home. If there are any complications in the birthing process, then the woman must be taken to the hospital in San Marcos, a two-hour trip by vehicle.

The infant mortality rate in Guatemala has dropped significantly in the last two decades; 1987 figures indicate a death rate of 72.3/1000 within the first year after birth for the region encompassing Comitancillo, and a figure of 57.9/1000 in 1999 (INE 2002). These figures represent the regional average for all of the southwestern zone of Guatemala, and infant mortality rates are always somewhat higher in rural and indigenous communities then in urban and Ladino communities (Jonas 1991; Samayoa 1993). The overall drop in aggregate infant mortality rates in the past two decades is evident in a comparison of the young women's reproductive records with those of their mothers. Granted these young women have only begun their potential reproductive phase; however, to date in this group only one (Sandra) had an infant die. In contrast, the mothers and grandmothers of these women lost an average of four infants each. The same threats to life exist today as in previous generations; respiratory and intestinal infections, and associated diarrhea and dehydration are the primary causes of death for infants (Feliciano 1996:109).

Nevertheless, the statistics collected on infant mortality within the first year of life may be missing the most critical period of a child's life. The majority of Comitecos likely fall within the official categories of "poor" and "extremely poor" (INE 2002), however the majority have basic, although limited nutrition. Regional statistics indicate that 54% of children under the age of five in the southwestern region of Guatemala are malnourished according to height/age indicators (INE 2002). The most critical nutritional period in Comiteco life span are the years immediately after weaning, from about one to three years of age, when young children are no longer breastfeeding because a new infant has arrived, and there are few highly nutritional food substitutes suitable for young children. During the years I spent in Comitancillo, the only very severe cases of malnutrition I encountered were among this age of children, often within a family where the other children were relatively healthy or surviving on a low-protein, high-carbohydrate diet of mostly maize and *hierbas* (wild greens).

7.2. Family Size Dilemmas

The birth control and ideal family size discussions have opened up considerably from what they were in the previous generation, but many of the elements of the debate remain the same. The principal opposition is the position of the Roman Catholic Church: all of the women indicated that the church views contraceptive injections and pills and sterilization procedures as a sin.

> They [the church leaders] say that if there is an opportunity for children to be born, they should be born. If one doesn't give them the opportunity to be born then it is a sin. All children are the children of God and no one can throw them away. It is a sin if one doesn't respect this. – Victoria, 17

> The church accepts the natural method [rhythm] but not pills or injections. They say it is bad, a sin. Operations are a sin as well. Because the Bible says "Go and multiply." That's the basis of the church, the Bible. But I am seeing that it is fine to "go and multiply" but all of a sudden we will multiply to 12 or 15; and from where are we going to get the money to sustain our children? That is the real problem I am seeing now. – Susana, 27

Male attitudes concerning birth control are also a very decisive factor in the birth control debate. In most cases, the women indicate that men continue to be suspicious of the resulting change in the power dynamics of their relationships if there is control over pregnancies.

> There are men that say that if a woman uses contraceptives she is "everyone's woman; she is a woman of the street." - Rosa, 28

The main argument that is turning the tables in the birth control discussion is the rising cost of raising children. All of the parents want to provide good food, clothing, education, and medicine for their children; and are concerned that education is vital, given the land shortage. At the same time the traditional concerns in rural peasant communities that explain the need for large families continue to persist: the high infant mortality rate, and the need to have children to care for one in old age. Women in the study mentioned all three of these factors.

The women keenly felt the fragility and uncertainty of human life. Sofia articulates this anxiety in the following passage:

> One also thinks about the sickness that can come, and one never knows if the baby will die or not. When the children get sick, we sometimes buy medicine in the *aldea* or better, yet we come here to the Health Centre in town, or wherever there is a doctor. There are some people that don't buy medicine. They say: "If babies die, it is because they wanted to die." But who knows if it is like that. Maybe because one didn't care for the baby with medicine, the baby died. – Sofia, 28

Interestingly, most of the women said that four to six children constitute the ideal family size. This number is lower than the last fewer generations, yet slightly higher than a completely urbanized modern society with minimal infant mortality and better health and social services (Samayoa 1993; INE 2002).

Ironically, in the case of the one couple in which the man is urging his wife to use birth control, she had other concerns that deterred her. Silvia's husband, Jaime, wants to use birth control because of the cost of caring for children and because they no longer have enough land to give them. Silvia's husband was the only one of the husbands in this group (or in the whole study, for that matter) to have spent several months in the United States working as an illegal migrant. His experience there may have influenced his perspective, because he initiated a conversation about the small size of families in the United States. Both Jaime and Silvia indicated that the Roman Catholic Church's position on birth control did not concern them.

Silvia had two overt concerns arising from her personal experience that prevented her from using birth control: infant mortality rate and her own health.

> I look around me and see that many babies die. My sister-in-law has lost three of her seven babies in the last eight years because of diarrhea, vomiting, and fever. What if I only have three babies, maybe half of them will die. So I want to have more...Also I have heard that pills can cause cancer. If I become sick because of the pills, maybe my husband will not want me anymore the same as he does now. Then we'd have to spend a lot of money on medicine to cure me. And if I am cured, I will still be alone, not having many children ...He suggested I could be sterilized. But what if I can't have any more children and then he decides that he wants more? He will look for another woman...And why is he pushing me when I am working [as a teacher] to support them and I don't have cancer? ...Anyway I am already 28 years old, so I don't think I will have many more. It is not as if I started to have babies at age 16. Maybe now I won't have very many. –Silvia, 28

Silvia is one of the most educated women in the group, and her concerns indicate more complicated layers of reasoning that involve not only traditional motivations for large families, such as high infant mortality rates and care in one's old age, but also new concerns about the impact on her own health, and the exclusivity in her relationship with her husband, and the depth of his commitment to her.

7.2. Family-Career Conflict for Women

Perhaps not surprisingly, as women become more involved in income-generating work, they face predicaments related to juggling domestic and work responsibilities. The young women who have become teachers struggle with many of the same issues as mothers who work outside the home all over the world. Several women expressed a great deal of worry and concern about how they could rightfully do their duty as care givers and nurturers, which they wanted to do for their families, and at the same time fulfill their responsibilities in their jobs.

Rosa's husband pushed her to get a job after graduation although they had two young babies at the time, but is has been a challenge to juggle a career and domestic responsibilities.

> I was working at a local NGO as the Literacy Coordinator; but I became very sick after the birth of my second child, and I lost my job. I stayed at home with the babies because it was difficult to work with the kids. But my husband asked: "When are you going to look for work? That's why I got a mature professional woman! You are have the same intelligience." But it is very difficult to be punctual in a job [when you have kids]...and I ended up with a job in Tacaná [a 3-hour bus trip away]. - Rosa, 28

The three women (Rosa, Rebeca, Silvia) in this sample who are teachers and have children have all resolved this problem by hiring a young woman to fulfill these domestic and childcare tasks in their absence. Furthermore, it is expected that children be physically with their mothers. Thus, despite the fact that Rosa works in a distant municipality, and her husband works in Comitancillo, she travels the winding country roads every two weeks with her children, and has a babysitter who takes care of them while she is in the classroom.

In none of these cases, or any other cases of dual-career couples observed the community, did men assume traditional women's responsibilities in the household. As Rosa describes it: "He [my husband] just looks at the children, he doesn't make the food or wash the clothes."

Women working for community organizations as community development workers or literacy instructors often hire young girls to provide childcare while they work. This young girl will care for the children close by so that the mother is easily accessible when the babies need breastfeeding. Raquel, Susana, Rosa, Ruth, and Silvia have all used this childcare method at some time or other.

When young professional women hire local girls as domestics, there are both positive and negative repercussions on the lives of other women in the community. Firstly, an economic and social gap is created between the well-educated young women who can afford to hire someone else to fulfill their female responsibilities and those they hire. The young women who work as domestics are those with little education, most often from more isolated communities, and with few opportunities. Until recently, domestic jobs were available only in Guatemala City or in other large urban centres, so in a sense this new development has opened up a new employment opportunity for young, poorly educated women in Comitancillo. Many would prefer to be closer to home, and their parents would be relieved that their daughters were not so susceptible to the vices and problems of living far from home in a large urban centre. On the other hand, the situation does serve to heighten the growing disparity between young people with education and those without.

Associated with this gap is the fact that often a relative, a younger sister or cousin, is hired to do the childcare and domestic work. It can be reassuring for the professional woman because she knows her children are in the care of female kin. Some young women doing domestic work in the town centre take advantage of the adult education opportunities in town, for others it can be a negative experience of poor wages and exploitation because they are kin and it is expected that they will support the family even if it is not an individual benefit to them.

While the young teachers and other women on salaries cope by hiring domestic and childcare assistance, women doing productive work in their homes do not have this alternative. Sofia described the frustration of trying to sew embroidered blouses at home with her children underfoot.

> What makes me the most happy is to have work that produces money, but when I think that I can do this on one day, my children do not let me have the time...If I sit down to sew, one comes: "Mama, my coffee? I am hungry..." they begin to say a million things. So what I think is that I will have to be content with the little that I can do, because with children, what can I do? It's more important that I attend them while they are growing. – Sofia, 28

Women in the reproductive years who are striving to increase their personal income-generation in the home-based or collective production activities face considerable time limitations and obstacles. As with their mothers' generation, they no longer have young girls available in the household for childcare duty because the young girls are all attending school. Many must bring their small children with them to all workshops and collective productive sessions, a reality that can severely limit their learning and productivity because of the constant interruptions and divided attention.

8. Household Relationship Dynamics

8.1. Renegotiating Husband-Wife Relationships

The previous sections of this chapter that describe the division of labour, management of money and resources, and decision-making regarding marriage and reproduction all point to a shift in the power dynamics of the husband-wife relationship in Comitancillo. Women have gained increased influence in household decision-making and independence, particularly as a result of greater education and increased income-generation capacity. While the selection of young women interviewed here is not statistically representative of the entire population of young Comiteca women, the participants in this study clearly indicate that a shift is occurring. Even among the young women in more traditional marriage and household situations, there is considerable evidence that young women have greater self-determination and more options than did their mothers and grandmothers. The majority of women still require their husband's "permission" to participate in meetings and community groups, but male attitudes about the value of women's participation in activities outside the home is changing.

> Some women live like me: they go to whatever meeting they want to. Sometimes I decide not to go, but it is my own decision because I have a lot of work to do or because there is no one to stay with the children and the house. Some husbands give their wives permission, but others say: "What are you going to do there? Waste time?" and a lot of other things. But some men give their wives permission to attend meetings, workshops, and assemblies because they know it is good. – Sofia, 28

There appears to be greater equity in the relationships between men and women, despite continued imbalance of power. Women are increasingly aware of their options and needs, and men rarely make decisions without involving their wives.

8.2. Navigating Patrilocal Household Relations

As with their mothers and grandmothers, today's newly married women experience tensions in their relationships with their parents-in-law and sisters-in-law due to the hierarchy of authority within the patrilocal household. Sandra is a young wife in this type of subordinate position.

> My problem is that the other daughter-in-law and I do all the work. My husband's sisters do not come into the kitchen for anything, only to eat. My husband tells me not to worry about it, but sometimes I don't know how I can bear it. ...Other people tell me that it's just like that: the daughters-in-law have to do all the work. – Sandra, 21

On the other hand, these tensions appear to be less frequent than in previous generations because the length of time spent living in the patrilocal household is diminishing as young couples establish separate households much sooner. In the sample here, only two (Sandra and Rebeca) of the seven married women lived with their parents-in-law; all of the others had established a separate household within a year of marriage. This pattern contrasts sharply with their mothers, who spent between 5 to 15 years in their husbands' parents' household.

While in-law relationships dominate the lives of married women, the unmarried women's lives are dominated by their parents, particularly their fathers, and then by their older brothers. As mentioned above, all of the unmarried women lived in their father's households. Issues concerning the care of the aging parents, and the inheritance of the house are important in these situations, as was described earlier in this chapter. However, of paramount importance in the lives of these women is the shift of patriarchal power in the household as their fathers grow older. There is a transfer of dominance from the father to the oldest sons. This pattern has little impact on the women who do not have older brothers (i.e., Raquel, Teresa, Susana, Sandra, Ramona), but the lives of the women that do have older brothers are greatly affected. Reina, Rosa, and Ruth have received largely supportive and encouraging influence from their older brothers. All of their brothers encouraged them to continue studying, advised them on employment, and sometimes controlled their decisions. These brothers ultimately have the decision-making power over the household property and resources as their fathers' power declines.

The growing influence of elder brothers within the family can also be problematic for young women, as is evident in the cases of Roberta and Violeta. Roberta's brothers are challenging her freedom and independence, as well as her inheritance. In Violeta's case, her elder brother, a police officer in Guatemala City, initially supported her educational aspirations. He allowed her to live in his empty house next to her parents, and even loaned her some money. However, recently he has become hostile towards her, forcibly removing her from his house, and threatening her with harm. Her parents cannot seem to control his behaviour nor protect Violeta. She wishes she could escape to live far away from this problem in her family. Her father was able to deed a piece of land to her, and with money from her teaching position she has built her own one-room house inside the patio of her parents' house, but she still does not feel completely safe from the hostility of her brother.

8.3. Coping with Alcoholism and Abuse

Alcoholism continues to be a pervasive problem in highland Mayan communities. Five of the women in this sample had alcoholic fathers or husbands. Women themselves rarely drink alcohol; there is strong community disapproval of women drinking, as there has always been in this region.

> In my community there are a few women that drink. I don't know why they do; maybe they tried it once and then got accustomed to it. But there are just a few. If a woman drinks, it is viewed as very ugly/bad; it is a disgrace if a woman is lying in the street drunk. The people just look at her and wonder what she was doing drinking. It is not accepted that women drink, like it is for men. I don't know why. – Sofia, 28

Despite the acceptance of male drinking, there seems to be a pattern of heavy drinking in young married men, and then as they grow older they stop drinking and begin to focus on productive activities. This is the case with both Violeta and Teresa's fathers, as well as many other cases observed in the community. While these men were drinking heavily for several years, they not only channeled scarce cash resources into the purchase of alcohol, but failed to cultivate the little land they had. Thus, these families relied on *finca* income while their fathers drank continuously.

> In that time my father drank a lot of liquor almost every day, and we did not have enough to eat because my father did not plant *milpa* because he was drinking. He would just buy a few pounds of maize for us to eat. – Teresa, 25

Both of these men eventually quit drinking alcohol, and have become very successful commercial farmers. Teresa's father has several profitable vegetable crops every year that he sells to the agro-export firms; and Violeta's father cultivated several irrigated vegetable fields, and has more recently purchased a large truck and entered into the transport business.

As mentioned previously, women appear to accept that men occasionally indulge in binge drinking; "it's what men do." Both Susana and Sofia are unhappy that their husbands drink, but accept this practice because in neither case is he abusive or irresponsible with the needs of the family.

> When he drinks he doesn't treat me badly, but I don't like him to drink. This is a problem for me. When he arrives drunk, he arrives home quietly. He drinks once or twice a week, sometimes not at all. – Susana, 27
>
> The only problem we have is that sometimes my husband drinks, on Sundays [market day] he drinks. Firstly, I worry that something can happen to him; there are people that aren't happy that he got the teaching job he has, and they are jealous. So I worry about that. But when he drinks he doesn't treat me badly. He does treat me badly if I say bad words to him when he is drunk. Then he gets mad. ..But he has never ended up lying drunk by the road [like many men do]. He drinks in town or sometimes on the road home because they sell beer on the way. But he always arrives home. He is also responsible in his work; he always goes to work on Monday. – Sofia, 28

On the other hand, if a man's drinking prevents him from fulfilling his family responsibilities or causes him to abuse his family, then women in Comitancillo end the relationship if they have the resources to survive without the man. For example, as described earlier in this chapter, Raquel's husband was alcoholic and physically and verbally abusive. Like other women of her age group, she did not put up with this behaviour, and after two short years of marriage, she left him. She followed the adage that is commonly quoted by young women in the region: "Mejor sola, que mal acompanada" [Better off alone, than poorly accompanied].

9. Ethnic/Gender Identity

This generation of women is expanding the ways in which they define their ethnic identity. While previous generations of women have largely rooted their identities to very specific places and communities, with little reference to the outside world and their relationship to it, the younger generation, particularly those with more education and exposure to regional and national debates, are developing new ways of defining their identities.

9.1. The Centrality of Gender to Ethnic Identity

One aspect has remained constant across the generations: the women continue to emphasize their femaleness within their definition of their ethnicity. When asked how they see themselves, they will always begin by saying that they are women, first and foremost. Obviously, when speaking in Spanish, gender cannot be separated from ethnicity (*Yo soy Comiteca*) because the sex of the speaker is integrated into the word. In Mam, the phrase is gender neutral (*ajTxoljaquin*); this indicates that the speaker is from Comitancillo (*Txolja*). Some Comitecos[3] assert that implicit in the phrase is the Maya principal of duality and complementarity (e.g., male-female; sun-moon; earth-sky) are embedded into the identification, thus including both male and female in the term (Prado 1999). Thus although in Mam gender identification is not as clear as in Spanish, the Mayan perception of dyads and the addition of the word woman (*kya*) when self-identifying are indicative of an equally strong sense of femaleness integrated into ethnic identity. This suggests that being a woman may in some ways have as much impact as ethnicity on their sense of themselves and their identities, and that being a female person from Comitancillo is quite different from being a male person from Comitancillo.

Women continue to bear the most visible sign of ethnic identification: their clothing. While in most highland communities (notable exceptions being Sololá and Todos Santos) men abandoned traditional clothing about two decades ago, indigenous women continue to wear traditional clothing throughout the highlands. When a woman puts on Ladina clothing, she is sending a signal that she is no longer identifying with her community; and therefore is outside of the expectations and rights of that community. Two incidents illustrate this:

An Incongruent Young Couple: Women as the Guardians of Culture

> Next to me in a physician's waiting room in Quetzaltenango was a young couple of about 20 years of age from Totonicapán, a large prosperous indigenous community located nearby. The young woman was wearing very elaborate and sparkling new traditional women's clothing from the region; her young husband was wearing Levi jeans, Nike running shoes, and an expensive watch. She did not speak much Spanish, and was shy about speaking to me directly; but she was curious about me, so she whispered to her husband to ask me about what I was doing there. When we struck up a conversation, with mainly the husband doing the talking, the woman listening with great interest, I learned that he had been working off and on for the last couple of years in Florida. He found that working in the USA was a profitable way for him to make money and begin establishing a household and business in Totonicapán. At the same time, he insisted that

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[3] Personal communication with Lic. Rubén Feliciano and colleagues, September 2002.s

> his roots were in Totonicapán and that he wanted a traditional woman like his wife, not a woman from Florida. So while he worked in Florida, his young wife was well taken care of materially and lived comfortably in his parents' extended household.

Aracely: Appropriate Behaviour for a Comiteca

> Aracely is a young woman from Comitancillo, whose father is a community leader and prosperous farmer; and her mother is originally from a Ladino community on the coast. While her mother adopted Comiteca clothing when she married, she did not dress her daughters in traditional clothing. Aracely became pregnant as a teenager, and soon afterwards the father of the baby disappeared. She continued to live with her parents, and to struggle to earn money to provide for her daughter. She participated actively in many of the local women's organizations; however, she would only speak in Spanish, and continued to wear Ladina clothing (e.g., western skirts and blouses). About two years ago, she married a prosperous neighbouring widower with three small children. She now wears traditional Comiteca clothing and speaks Mam, while she operates her husband's small store, and bears his children.

Two very different trends in clothing are currently apparent among the women of Comitancillo. The large majority only wear the Comiteca-specific clothing for special occasions, and the rest of the time wear simple, less-costly cotton blouses with embroidered flowers and standard mass-produced *cortes*, usually from Totonicapán and Salcajá (see Appendix H – Photo File). Women chose to wear this clothing because it is the most affordable and readily available, and continues to fulfill the function of cultural and socio-economic marker. The young women who chose to wear distinctive and artistic articles of clothing from other Mayan communities, are making a political statement and identifying with the Pan-Maya movement.

When asked to characterize the attributes of a Comiteca woman, the women in this sample identified industriousness as the most salient attribute. Comiteca women are proud of their own ability to be productive and competent. They are not passive and withdrawn; but rather, Comitecas actively and astutely work to sustain their families.

> A woman cannot do anything without working or talking. For example if I was to just sit there, I couldn't accomplish anything. One cannot live like that. For me it is work, although I don't have a paid job, I raise animals. There are women that work in offices. I think a woman should struggle to learn a vocation or a skill, so that she does not remain the same as before. Education is important. Before women didn't have the chance to study; now women are always capacitating themselves. –Tomasa, 23

9.2. Expanding the Boundaries of Ethnic Identity

Women's perceptions of their ethnic identity continue to be very rooted in a specific geographical place; their perceptions are also expanding as women attend school, travel, experience the media, and have more interactions with people from other parts of the country. The "Pan-Maya" movement's conception of a larger Mayan identity has entered Comitancillo largely through the educated young people and the predominance of national debate on this issue during the negotiation of the Peace Accords. At the same time, it is clear that these young women see themselves as members of a distinct smaller group defined by place, language, and customs within the larger, loosely-knit ethnic group defined as "Maya." It is evident in the following excerpt that Violeta sees herself as Mam first, and Maya second.

> I feel that in my person I am in the group Mam. I couldn't be part of any other group because I was born, and that's the way I was taught to speak and to live. Well, I don't live exactly like my ancestors, because there is always change, but I accept the life I am living today. If I go to another place, it is not easy to accept the customs of another people. It's true that there are Maya in Guatemala but each group with different ways of living, acting and thinking. It's true that they are also Mayan people but you can see the difference in terms of language, you can't communicate with confidence, talking about things the way you can with other people from the Mam area. You also see the difference in the way they live and act. It's not easy to have trust like here; here one knows how we all live and how we act. – Violeta, 28

Expressing pride in their ethnic identity as Comiteca Maya-Mam women is a new element identified among the young women of the community. In previous generations women clearly identified themselves as Comitecas and as indigenous peoples. For these older women ethnic identity was acknowledged and accepted; but there was little sense or articulation of status, injustice, or dignity associated with it. Rather, ethnic identity simply existed. Today, ethnic identity has been a source of cultural renewal and pride. Tomasa eloquently expresses the newly emerging conscious value placed on ethnic and community identity.

> [San Pedranos] treat us [Comitecos] as if we are nothing more than animals. I don't know why they think that. They think that because we speak Mam. But what are we going to do if that is our language? I think that if one is born of his/her mother, as if one would not respect their mother! One has to accept it; one has to love it. That is how I think about my language. Not even if I say that another woman is prettier, or better; that I don't want to look at my own mother, it would be better if this other would be my mother; one can't do that. I think that the San Pedranos lost what is theirs. –Tomasa, 23

As with many minority, or non-dominant ethnic communities, language is one of the key elements that distinguishes and binds the group. All of these young women indicated that language was the key identifier of ethnicity for themselves and others, and that the preservation and use of the Mam language was the most important thing that they wanted to pass on to their children.

> We are starting to speak some Spanish with the children, but we think it is better to speak Mam. When they are bigger they will learn Spanish anyway. If we give them Spanish now then maybe they will get confused. They won't learn Mam. They will not appreciate our culture...Later when they go to school they will learn Spanish; for now let's teach them Mam. – Susana, 27

Although the Mayan communities of Guatemala have long experienced the dominance of the Ladino culture and state, their definition of themselves does not appear to be derived from an articulation of opposites. They recognize the discriminatory treatment they receive from Ladinos and San Pedranos, but they view themselves as "equal but different." At least in this young generation, the women express little surprise at the inferior status accorded to them by many Ladinos; but they do not seem to have internalized this as part of their own definition.

> Well, I think we are equal [the San Pedranas and us] but they sometimes treat us differently. But I believe that we are all people, and we are all equal. The difference is our clothing. The difference is our language, but we are equal. – Ramona, 22

This mature understanding of human equality and difference may be partly a result of government, educational, and NGO programs specifically aimed at building multicultural respect and harmony in a country that has been brutally divided by racial and class conflict. On the other hand, the historical strength and durability of the Comitecos' ethnic identity as a people from a specific place, with a specific language and customs, provides them with a firm foundation on which to adapt to the shifting identities, boundaries, and perceptions of ethnicity in the national context.

10. Summary

Four common life paths can be distinguished among the youngest generation of women in Comitancillo based on their marital and vocational characteristics: young married women in essentially peasant households; single mothers making an independent living; educated married women juggling families and jobs; and single working women. Each of these life paths reflects continuities and changes in the lives of young Comiteca women when viewed in light of their mothers' and grandmothers' lives.

A greater diversity of marriage and non-marriage choices have opened up for young women. The shift from a strictly peasant agricultural base to a more cash-based economy has weakened the "unequal mutuality" of the male-female duo at the centre of the household. No longer does a woman always require a man to survive, nor does a man require a woman. Education and wage labour opportunities have decreased women's economic dependency on men and the patriarchal household, and expanded the consciousness of their lives and their ethnic and gender identities. However, this opening has not touched all women equally; diverse social, economic, and locational factors significantly impact the opportunities and obstacles in women's lives.

Conversely, some aspects of being a Comiteca woman have remained constant throughout the twentieth century. Women's greatest satisfaction in life continues to centre on the well being and health of their families, and on access to the work and resources needed to sustain their families. The work performed by females of all ages within the household continues to be essential to the sustenance of the family. Endogamy, patrilocal residency, patriarchal household relationships, coping with male alcoholism, and the rootedness of ethnic and gender identities are common threads for women throughout the century.

While a generation ago most women lived similar lives, today there are greater differences between those women who have had educational, reproductive, and work opportunities and those who have not. A small 'elite' have access to wider possibilities, while a majority of young women struggle to live conscious, expanded, and satisfied lives within relatively restricted parameters.

Chapter Seven
Conclusion

The narratives of three generations of women presented here provide a wealth of information that enriches the database upon which to build an understanding of the larger general principles of how women's lives are structured and reshaped within the global context. In some ways, the existing theories concerning culture change, gender and development, and intra-household dynamics accurately reflect the lived experiences of the women of Comitancillo documented here. In other ways, the macro-level explanatory theories obscure the unique characteristics and dynamics that are evident in this particular time and place: that is, Maya-Mam women living in Comitancillo, Guatemala during the twentieth century. This concluding chapter will describe the ways in which the present study interacts with existing theory and will identify areas for further research.

1. Overarching Themes

1.1. Women's Voices: The Building Blocks of Theory

This study has endeavoured to contribute to the process of formulating "autonomous, geographically, historically and culturally grounded feminist concerns and strategies" (Mohanty 1997:79), that overcome the over-simplification, generalizations (homogenization of the category of "Third World Women"), and Western bias (problems of "representation") that frequently permeate gender and development theory. In order to do so, the methodology employed in this particular study focused on the voices of women in a particular time and place (Momsen and Kinnaird 1993). Theory that accurately reflects and explains the lived experiences of women can only be constructed with the input of a multitude of voices within on-going relationships, not brief encounters shaped by predetermined theoretical questions.

Following Marchand's proposal (1995), this study has aimed to bring the experience and knowledge of marginalized women into gender and development discourse through the use of "testimonies", that is, the life stories and meanings which the women themselves articulate. This open-ended and on-going approach to conversations with highland Maya women facilitates the integration of these voices into a discussion that is usually dominated by voices from more privileged sectors, such as North American academia, urban Ladina professionals, and even the few selected Mayan women who have become known as representatives of the interests of all "Mayan women" to wider society. At the level of data collection, this methodology prevents, as much as possible, the construction of conclusions based solely on external observations and answers to closed questions, and increases the likelihood of generating findings that are firmly grounded in the perspectives of the women themselves. At the same time, merely focusing on "women's voices" is not enough; the researcher must be fully consciousness of her position in relation to the research constituency (Okeke 1997), and mindful of the ways she collects and utilizes the words gained in this manner (Phillips 1996).

1.2. The Diversification and Stratification of Women's Lives

The stories of three generations of Comiteca women documented here reveal the continuities, changes, and increasing diversity of what it means to be a woman in the Maya-Mam community of Comitancillo. During this century, women made a transition from a single predictable life path within a relatively stable and secure culturally and geographically-based community in the first half of the century, to the diversity and stratification of women's lives within the rapidly changing and increasingly interconnected world evident at the end of the century. There is also an increasingly alarming disparity between those women who have been in a position to benefit in some ways from global and national socio-economic trends, while others are falling further and further behind. This is creating an increasingly socio-economically stratified community, with the emergence of a materially prosperous and/or well educated sector, and an increasingly destitute sector with dwindling options.

This study highlights the need to recognize heterogeneity at all levels: regional, municipal, and even household. As research in other areas has recently noted, there continues to be an assumption of homogeneity within rural communities (e.g., Gardner and Lewis 1996:112; Vivian and Maseko 1994), yet the evidence from Comitancillo illuminates the internal heterogeneity and increasing diversification of rural communities, particularly those experiencing rapid change. For example, some of the *aldeas* of Comitancillo (e.g., Chicalajaj and Tuichelupe) have greater access, resources, and influence because of historic, locational, and social factors. Others, because of these very same factors, are much more isolated both physically and socially from the activities and trends of the municipality as a whole.

The process of diversification has also been accompanied by a trend towards increased socio-economic stratification, between households and between women, as some women and men are more advantaged than others. Access to new educational, employment, and productive opportunities is variable throughout the municipality, between households, and within households. Physical location, cultural perspectives, and family structure all influence the ability of women to respond to changes in their socio-economic surroundings. In addition, a woman's individual characteristics play a role in determining her utilization, adaptation, or resistance to external changes.

1.3. Integrating Time Variables into the Analysis of Gender

Perhaps the most pervasive and unique theme that repeatedly surfaces in this study is the importance of time-related variables to an understanding of women's lives. Historical socio-economic context has long been recognized as critical to an accurate understand of a particular cultural community (e.g., Smith 1990; Watanabe 1992; Carlsen 1997). Generational position has also always been an important consideration in anthropological, sociological and gender studies (e.g. Katz and Monk 1993; Chant and McIlwaine 1998).

This study attempts to integrate three chronological processes at once: generational roles within the household, changing household structures over time, and the larger socio-economic history of the community. Multiple comparisons, trends, and processes were tracked through various dimensions, both longitudinally and laterally. For example, longitudinally the changing position of young girls in the household over a period of one-hundred years is traced, and laterally the impact of a specific external economic change on women of different generations is examined. More complex is the effort to integrate several time variables at once, such as life course, generational position, socio-economic change, and historical context. An example is the finding that women in the oldest generation largely benefited from traditional female status within a relatively coherent cultural community, and the youngest generation of women were able to benefit in some ways from the innovations of the last couple of decades, but the middle generation of women experienced the loss of traditional female status, and few of the benefits of the new possibilities. This middle generation of women experienced this disadvantage because of transitions in gender-based household structures over time, their particular lifespan (year of birth) in the century, and the overall process of socio-economic development in the community.

The data documented here concerning the time dimension in the studies of women's lives are relatively preliminary, and indicate the need for further exploration and documentation of the way in which time variables interact with other elements to shape the lives of women globally.

2. The Specifics of Women's Lives

2.1. Land: More than an Economic Variable

> My father gave each of us two *cuerdas* of land. I want to build my own house. I want to buy a little more land and then build a house and plant *milpa*. That's what I think. Those are my dreams. – Rosa María, 30

> I am Comiteca, because I am from Comitancillo. I can't say I am San Marquense, because that's not my municipality. My municipality is Comitancillo. I am identified by where I am really from. - Rebeca, 25

As it has been for centuries, land continues to be the foundation of Maya-Mam culture and security, despite the declining viability of subsistence agriculture. The shift from collective community land ownership and family-based utilization to private ownership and cultivation at the beginning of the century lessened, but did not completely eliminate, women's access to, inheritance of, and ownership of land.

In the youngest generation, a growing number of women, both married and single, see formal ownership and greater control over land as a solution to the decline of the traditional sources of livelihood and security for women. This trend is consistent with the WAD concern for women's independent access to the primary subsistence and productive resources, in this case land, and with the GAD emphasis on the need to strengthen women's legal rights, including land ownership and inheritance laws (Visvanathan 1997:18-19). However, the subtlety that may be overlooked in these generalized analyses is the non-economic significance of land. A powerful theme in the Comiteca women's narratives is that land is not only a means to subsistence economic survival; land also provides a sense of place, social security, and community belonging. The socio-cultural significance of land and the gender dimensions of the attachment to the land need to be further explored, particularly in rural ethnic communities that are historically and culturally tied to a specific geographical place.

It is also notable that while women in Comitancillo have unequal access and ownership of land, the fact that they do have land is in dramatic contrast to women in other parts of Africa, Asia, and Latin America (Boserup 1970; Deere and León de Leal 1981; Moore 1988; Saito and Spurling 1992). Comitancillo is similar to patterns in other parts of the southern continents in that commercial crop production is largely a male domain; however, unlike elsewhere, the men continue to be involved in subsistence production as well, particularly in staple grains, while women's agricultural work centres on animal raising and gardening. While Comiteca women do not usually take responsibility for the *milpa* plots unless the male household head is absent, she does inherit, own, and bequeath land. This pattern is a unique aspect of the Comitancillo situation, and deserves further investigation.

2.2. Debating the Primacy of Economics

> To be a Comiteca woman is to work. One cannot accomplish anything without work. I work raising animals; some women earn money in jobs. But, if I were just sitting around, I wouldn't be doing anything. One can't live this way. For me, being a Comiteca woman, means to work. – Tomasa, 23

Perhaps the most obvious changes in the community in general, and women's lives in particular, have been triggered by transformations in the economic sphere during this century. The expansion of global capitalism and the associated development of a modern bureaucratic nation state had direct impact on the economic base, labour obligations and opportunities, education, transportation, and infrastructure present in the lives of Comitecos. The recognition of the power of global and national economic and political forces in the lives of the women and men of this rural indigenous community substantiates once again the analysis of the economically-based development theories of all political persuasions, such as the modernization, dependency, and political economy approaches outlined in the first chapter. Similarly, the power of economic forces at the household level is evident in Comitancillo, supporting the "economic-impact" explanations in peasant household studies of the past few decades also reviewed in chapter one.

Nonetheless, despite the often overwhelming power of global and state socio-economic forces to produce change in the political and economic lives of marginalized indigenous communities, the narratives of these Comiteca women provide evidence that internal household and community dynamics, ethno-cultural identity, and individual personality are also critical in shaping both the changes and continuities within the community and within the household. For example, particular family personalities can determine which women are able to take advantage of new educational or economic opportunities. Culturally-based gender roles and responsibilities influence the adoption, integration, and utilization of various income-generating possibilities. Women occasionally renegotiate the standard gender divisions, as is evident in the women's acquisition of footlooms. Individual interest, ability, and character traits affect the survival strategies and life path that a woman chooses. The non-economic influences apparent in the stories of Comiteca women require further research; however, the evidence suggests that a variety of non-economic factors play a decisive role in shaping the lives and household dynamics of women in indigenous communities in transition.

This analysis leads to the continuing debate concerning the "analytical primacy of economic class over ethnicity as the major motor of social relations in rural communities" (Stephen 1991:11-12). The Comitancillo case study illuminates the complex weaving of these two factors. The ethnic identity which Comitecos express outside the municipality is a largely homogeneous and harmonious one that emphasizes common birth and residence, language, shared customs and material artifacts, and community solidarity. This is a response to the pervasive racial and ethnic discrimination that Comitecos continue to experience outside their community, and the manner in which outsiders tend to lump all Maya into a single indistinguishable category. The internal version of ethnic identity is also characterized by common historical land, language, customs, and artifacts, but in addition allows for socio-economic, age, and gender stratifications to subtly permeate local social structure.

Thus, referring back to the perspectives on the relationship of economic class, ethnicity, and social structure in Guatemalan society as outlined in chapter one, this study finds that a complex web of economic and ethnic hierarchies exist within the community, between the community and the external society, and between individual members of the community and their individual relationships with the outside world.

2.3. The Link Between the Mode of Production and Women's Status

Scholars of various political perspectives argue that women's status in a society is associated with the mode of production: some researchers reason that women's status improves in the transition from subsistence to capitalist mode of production (e.g., Boserup 1970), while other researchers conclude that women's status declines in this transition (e.g., Deere and de Leal 1981; Connelly et al. 1995; Visvanathan 1997). Over the course of the last century, Comiteca women have experienced this economic transition and the associated changes in the nature and diversity of their productive lives. Collective craft production, enhanced small animal husbandry, participation in cash crop production, and employment as rural extension workers, literacy educators, and teachers, are among the main income-generating activities available to them in the growing cash economy. Circulation into the capitalist economy through migratory labour continues today, not only in the agro-export economy, but also as domestic labour in the urban centres, and more recently as illegal migrants to the United States.

The women's narratives documented here indicate that throughout the process of greater economic integration into the global economy, women have continued to occupy traditional female peasant productive and reproductive roles, often in addition to new work in the capitalist sector, or work maintaining the subsistence agricultural sector while the men are away working in the capitalist sector.

The experience of Comiteca women distinctly fits Marxist explanations that women's unpaid domestic work and reproductive services are critical for capitalist employers, whose profits hinge on paying workers less than the true value of their labour (Jaquette 1982). While it is true that from an external perspective, this is the function women fulfill within global economic structures, this explanation does not articulate women's perceptions of the role they are occupying. It would be critical to explore, in greater depth, the role of women as bearers, guardians, and reproducers of cultural identity and community, particularly for the Mayan communities of the Guatemalan highlands that have survived centuries of external pressure through protective tactics such as resistant internal cohesion and selective adaptation. Women's domestic, reproductive, and subsistence work has been a large part of this continued cultural and community survival, because men were integrated more quickly and more tightly into the global capitalist economy.

2.4. How is Women's Status Measured?

> I think that the lives of women today have changed a lot; it's not like it was before...Young women have a lot of freedom now...whereas before young women could not go out anywhere...Before there was justice against men that committed crimes, but now men just bribe the judge and get away free. Those are the differences that I am observing in our present day. Maybe we will never return to live by the law of our ancestors. – Alicia, 46

Another one of the primary debates in gender and development theory outlined at the beginning of this study concerns the identification of women's gains and losses in the process of integration into the global economy and national socio-political structures, and how we measure this progression. The narratives of the women from Comitancillo indicate that the experience is mixed for most women. The status and security accorded women within traditional peasant households and cultural communities have largely disappeared for Comiteca women. For example, Comiteca women have lost control over the household food supplies, have less access to younger female labour in the household, no longer have recourse to community justice mechanisms against domestic abuse, have become dispensable as producers of household goods such as pottery and textiles, and have lost much of the respect and status accorded to women in historic customs and public roles.

At the same time, many, although not all, Comiteca women have experienced an increase of individual power and self-determination as they become more independent of the traditional structures that bound them to men and their households, and destined them to a single life path. As women have opportunities to earn cash, control resources, own land, and obtain education and professions, they do have more ability to make choices independently and improve the quality and security of their lives. However, not all women have experienced these benefits in the transition from subsistence to cash economies, from insular to global community. Most women have lost the traditional status and security of the closely integrated cultural community, but have not been able to replace these with the new resources and opportunities that enhance individual power and self-determination, and improve quality and security of life. Again, differences of geography, personality, family context, and personal history affect who benefits and who does not.

In addition, utilizing self-determination in economic, educational, and reproductive realms as the measure of improved status for women does not necessarily reflect the perceptions of the women in question. This discrepancy points to the danger of utilizing western feminist yardsticks for measuring women's status in southern countries (e.g., Ong 1988; Visvanathan 1997:28). The Comiteca narratives suggest that education and employment are not the only measures of a woman's status; her skills and abilities, her role as reproducer and nurturer of her family, and her identity as a Comiteca woman are also central to a woman's evaluation of her status in the household and the community.

While women generally accept and appreciate the changes that have occurred over the decades that have improved the quality of their lives, such as improved food security and quality, increased access to education and transportation, and technological innovations that lighten the domestic workload, they are also cognizant of the negative aspects of change. For example, they recognize the contradiction between encouraging young women to continue their schooling while knowing that further education generally contributes to the loss of traditional respect for the elders and other cultural practices. Most of the women perceive the reliance on cash to meet household needs as a major difficulty because the majority of them do not have ready access to income-generating activities. The women lament the loss of community coherence as people are scattered because of labour migrations, work and educational obligations, and local economic decline. And they perceive the decline of culturally-based practices such as the justice processes and responsible patriarchy as a loss of security for members of the community, whiche has not been adequately replaced by state structures.

2.5. Education: The Ultimate Solution?

> My hope is that my children are able to graduate and take advantage of the opportunity we are giving them to secure their futures. We as parents do not want them to suffer as we do, confronting a life that is so difficult. If I had some education, my life would be different. - Catarina, 45

It is clearly apparent from the narratives of these three generations of Comiteca women that formal education is perceived as a powerful tool for achieving economic security and improved quality of life for women in this rural Mam community. This observation corroborates the macro-level perspectives in gender and development that emphasize the education of girls and women as the key to positive change at the household and community level (Smyke 1991; Jeffery and Jeffery 1998). As in rural communities worldwide, the perception of education in Comitancillo has shifted from an irrelevant and unnecessary process that alienates children from their families and cultural identity within a subsistence agriculture community, to being the greatest asset in an increasingly land-pressured community and cash-based economy. Attitudes have changed so much that in the last decade, the numbers of girls now nearly equal boys at the primary school level.

The stories of the Comiteca women indicate that they view education as important not only for providing increased income-generating potential, an alternative to subsistence agriculture, and a source of economic independence, but women's education is also seen as a process of awareness building and empowerment. This perception moves beyond the frequently narrow objectives of State and development agency agendas that promote women's "education" and "employment" as a tool for women's fertility reduction or improved family health indicators (Visvanathan 1997:26; Jeffery and Jeffery 1998). In the Comitancillo case, the women identify changes in gender relationships, public status, and collective action that they see as a direct result of both children's and adult education. Thus for these women, education is not only a process of learning, increased participation, and awareness-raising, but it is empowering in the sense that it results in individual and collective actions that impact social relations and community well-being, a perception similar to that identified by Stromquist (1992:266-269) elsewhere in Latin America.

Once again, it is the specifics of time, place, culture, and personality that may be glossed over in the emphasis on the benefits of education for girls and women. All three generations of Comiteca women in this study recognized the contradictions inherent in the process of education. While they valued the independence, confidence, respect, and economic security that accompanies increased education, they lamented the loss of traditional values, skills, and lifestyles that almost always accompanies formal education, particularly educational systems established and managed by external State administrators and teachers.

2.6. Tempering "Economic-Impact" Explanations of Household Structure

The Comitancillo case illustrates the power of external economic forces to impose change upon smaller communities, and trigger easily observable changes in the productive lives of the residents. On the other hand, marriage and household relationships are largely socially and culturally-based interactions, and thus response to physical economic change is more gradual, multifaceted, and unpredictable. The narratives of the Comiteca women attest to the slower pace of change within this arena, the modifying influence of cultural and social patterns, and the greater power of individuals and the community to determine what is accepted, rejected, adapted, or resisted.

Patrilocal households and endogamous marriage have remained constant throughout the century. Marriage outside the community is rare despite increased opportunities for exogamous marriages, through moves to the city for work or education, international migration, and increased movement and interaction between highland communities. The reasons for the continued practice of marriage within the community appear to be related to the strong sense of community cultural identity that is rooted in the specific place of Comitancillo, and the desire to preserve cultural identity and community in the face of powerful external forces.

The reproductive lives of women appear to be the arena that is the most impervious to externally imposed change and internally generated renegotiation and transformation. This is an area of strong emotions and opinions, particularly as reproduction is tightly enmeshed with people's sense of community cultural identity, aspirations for the future, the physical survival of the community, and deep convictions about the gender roles and responsibilities. Many young women are now questioning the inevitable succession of pregnancies that characterized the lives of their mothers and grandmothers, and recognize the disadvantages of a large family in an increasingly cash-based community. At the same time, there are still many dilemmas that remain unresolved at both the societal and the individual level, before reproductive planning will be comfortably integrated into their lives. Infant and maternal health, cultural ideals, religious beliefs (particularly Roman Catholic doctrine), and gender expectations all figure in the discussion and renegotiation of women's reproductive lives and Comiteco family structure.

2.7. Consensus versus Struggle Models of Household Relationships

The evidence suggests that the consensus model of internal relationships, whether authoritarian or cooperative, does not accurately reflect the way peasant households function. On the other hand, models that focus on the competing personal agendas and struggles between household members excessively accentuate the adversarial aspects of internal household relationships.

The dynamics of husband-wife relationships have undergone change in this century. The narratives of each successive generation of women indicate an increasing amount of interaction and negotiation, and for many, greater gender balance within the marriage union. The management of household cash and resources, decision-making within the family, male alcohol consumption, and female freedom of activity outside the household are primary areas of negotiation for the younger women.

According to the women's narratives, relationships with other family and household members are not as binding and authoritative in women's lives at the end of the twentieth century as they were at the beginning. The general weakening of the patrilocal household, as young people are less dependent on the inheritance of land, and have more opportunities for livelihoods outside the peasant household, has changed the intensity of hierarchical relationships within the household. Fathers, husbands, and brothers continue to play an influential and protective role in the lives of women, but this role is variable and less intense. The influence of the mother-in-law has also decreased, as women are no longer as dependent on her approval for harmonious living environments, access to resources, and future security. Friction between daughters-in-law living in the same patrilocal household continues to be an issue, but largely for practical reasons, such as limited resources and division of duties.

Since neither the consensus nor the struggle models of household dynamics accurately depicts the situation in Comitancillo, it would be useful to explore further the gender and age-based relationships and strategies that operate within highland Mayan households.

2.8. Exploring Ethno-Cultural Identity

> We are true Comitecos because we belong here; every member of our family was registered there, and my whole family is born in this municipality. It is also right here that we have received our inheritance of land from our parents. For this reason we cannot separate ourselves from this municipality. – Catarina, 45

In the course of the twentieth century, Comitecos' cultural identity has experienced a transition, largely as a result of the community's intensified integration into the socio-economic fabric of the nation. While it is still tied to a very specific geographical location (the municipality), there is also a greater appreciation of being part of a larger cultural group, the Mam of western Guatemala, and the Maya of Guatemala in general. The awareness and acceptance of a larger cultural identity is not entirely new, as throughout the century, and in the previous centuries, there has always been trade, interchange, and conflict between the various communities of the highlands. However, integration into the global capitalist economy on a regular basis, the armed conflict of the last few decades, and the Maya cultural revitalization movement have strengthened a sense of common identity, interest, and collective action among the Mayan communities of Guatemala, and this new vision can be felt among the women of Comitancillo.

However, once again, this generalized statement must be qualified. There is a great range of perceptions within Comitancillo: some of the younger, more educated people have a very strong pan-Maya identity, while the majority of Comitecos have a much more nebulous sense of this larger level cultural identity. In truth, probably one of the reasons Comitancillo was spared much of the violence of the armed conflict was that Comitecos did not adopt a larger sense of identity, and they remained distant from the collective class- and ethnic-based struggles of the 1980s. It has only been in the last decade that pan-Mayan ideas have been captured and developed by some Comitecos.

Whether women see themselves as essentially Comiteca or as having a pan-Maya identity, one striking characteristic of their sense of self is the importance of gender within their ethnic identity. As has been observed elsewhere (Smith 1995), at the end of the twentieth century, Mayan women continue to bear the most visible signs of ethnic identity, and be the primary reproducers/bearers of culture. They wear traditional clothing, speak to their children in Mam, teach their children to work the land and care for animals, prepare the centuries-old meals based on the Maya triad of maize, beans, and squash, and pass on some of the traditional craft skills to their daughters. At the same time, they are reinventing and adapting cultural values and practices to fit into the changed socio-economic environment. Women who are poor and uneducated still struggle with oppression and a sense of inferiority in non-Mayan contexts, however, the better-off, and the more educated women have adopted the ethnic pride evident in the Maya cultural revitalization movement. They proudly wear the visually identifiable clothing, speak Mam, and/or develop their weaving skills. In fact, many of the young men wish there was a more visible way to identify themselves as Maya, and express their cultural pride.

The narratives documented in this study indicate that for Comiteca women, the meaning of their lives has always been, and continues to be, deeply rooted in their ethno-cultural identity and the specific gender-based roles, rights, and obligations within that community. They continue to perceive their basic position in and perspective on the world as Maya-Mam, Comiteca women. Their primary identity and life meanings are not found solely in their gender (as members of the global category of women), or their nationality (Guatemalan), or in their careers or vocations (e.g., a teacher, a weaver, an extension worker). Rather the two elements that are combined at the core of their identities are their ethno-cultural heritage (Maya-Mam-Comiteca*)*, and the fact that they are female.

It is also apparent from the narratives that throughout the twentieth century, the primary concern of Comiteca women has been, and continues to be, their responsibility to meet the basic needs of their families. The greatest anxieties and difficulties in these women's lives revolve around their ability to provide for the physical and material well being of their families. Within the peasant household context of the first half of the century, this responsibility was balanced with the male task of providing the basic goods for subsistence from *milpa* cultivation. The declining viability of peasant agriculture, combined with increased integration into the cash economy and more non-traditional household compositions, such as single mothers and never-married women, have made it more difficult for women to fulfill their responsibility to care for the well being of their families.

Given this precarious situation, women's personal satisfaction and happiness comes from having the ability, skills, and opportunities to produce the goods or money needed to meet these needs. Women feel particular contentment and pride when they have reliable and independent ways of meeting the needs of and caring for their families. In addition, many of them take pleasure in the beauty and self-expression available to them in weaving, pottery, and other creative endeavours.

Comiteca women's concern for the well being of their families does not confine them to the home as nurturing, altruistic women whose lives revolve around their families and are unaware and uninvolved in the world around them (Stormquist 1992:266), rather, as in the case of other women's movements in Latin America (Jaquette 1994), Comiteca women's sense of their responsibility as women to care for their families is the springboard for their involvement in collective action to improve their individual, household, and community lives, and begin to renegotiate inequitable social relations at all levels. Obviously, these Mayan women are at the very initial stages of a journey towards greater political action based on their lives as women and as Maya, and it will be fascinating to watch the unique characteristics and methods that these women develop on this journey.

3. Summary: One Hundred Years in the Lives of Comiteca Women

I am a woman who is Mam, indigenous, Comiteca, and poor. – Dolores, 42

The narratives of three generations of women in Comitancillo tell the story of changing gendered lives over time in a specific cultural and geographic context. The data not only reveal the diversification and renegotiation of women's life paths in the particular community; they also both support and challenge the existing theories concerning gender and development, both at the community and household levels.

At the beginning of the century, women's lives were significantly prescribed by economics, culture, and limited options. Any diversity in women's lives was largely a result of individual situation and personality; for example, which craft they engaged in, or their choice of marriage partner. While their lives followed a standard basic pattern, as is common in many smaller, indigenous communities, the cultural community in which they lived provided a holistic structure of expectations and support for women. Their lives were not easy nor necessarily happy, because the harsh realities of externally-imposed labour migrations, taxes, and poverty resulted in material and food shortage, sweeping illnesses, and never-ending labour, however, their cultural community was internally integrated and provided a measure of security.

The women of the middle of the century experienced the decline of the traditional economic base of the community, the impact of external economic changes, and increased educational possibilities. The majority of them were not in a position to take full advantage of the educational and productive opportunities opening up, and at the same time experienced the loss of status and security associated with the traditional cultural patterns. This middle generation was largely unable to benefit from the securities of the traditional cultural community or the opportunities available in the modern community.

The lives of the youngest generation of women exhibit the greatest diversity of life paths for twentieth century Comiteca women, and at the same time reveal an increasing stratification of women depending on their access to education and work within contemporary society. Within the municipality, there are enormous disparities between the young women who have been able to take advantage of new opportunities and those, who because of location, family, or social and cultural factors have not been able to do so.

There is no longer a basic standard blueprint that fits all rural Mayan women; rather, the past century has created greater heterogeneity and stratification among the women of Comitancillo. While some have been able to adapt to, and even benefit from, the changes in their community and the world around them, others have been disadvantaged by the transition from a subsistence Mayan community to a community integrated into a modern nation-state and the global cash-based economy. Yet despite the disparities evident in the lives of contemporary Comiteca women, it is clear that young women today continue, like their mothers and grandmothers, to strive to live their lives as Comitecas and as women, and will do so into the next century.

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APPENDIX A

RESEARCH AGREEMENT WITH LOCAL ORGANIZATION

ASOCIACION MAYA-MAM DE INVESTIGACION Y DESARROLLO
A.M.M.I.D.
COMITANCILLO, SAN MARCOS, GUATEMALA, CENTRO AMERICA.

A QUIEN CORRESPONDE:

De la manera atenta nos dirigimos a Ud. para exponer lo siguiente:

1. Nuestra organización denominada Asociación Maya-Mam de investigación y Desarrollo, identificada con las siglas A.M.M.I.D., reconocida por el gobierno de Guatemala a través de su Personalidad Jurídica mediante Acuerdo Ministerial No. 373-97 de fecha 11 de noviembre de 1997, es una asociación local de desarrollo comunitario cuyo objetivo principal es el establecimiento de un Centro de Capacitación, Investigación y Programas comunitarios para promover el desarrollo participativo y autogestionario del municipio de Comitancillo. Trabajamos con hombres, mujeres y niños campesinos mediante cuatro programas que son: Agroecología, Desarrollo de la mujer, Educación hacia la Democracia y Salud integral.
2. Hemos sostenido pláticas con la señora Adriana Wiebe para ver la posibilidad de realizar una investigación acción-autogestionaria sobre el eje temático "La vida de la mujer campesina y el rol que juega en la familia ante los cambios socioeconómicos". Consideramos que dicho estudio vendría a fortalecer el proceso de formación y participación de la mujer en las distintas facetas de su realidad social, económica, cultural y política desde una perspectiva autogestionaria, la cual hemos estado facilitando en nuestro programa de la Mujer. Además, a la par de dicha investigación queremos desarrollar un proyecto de producción artesanal con enfoque cultural para que el trabajo sea teórico-práctico.
3. Queremos hacer constar que la Señora Wiebe estuvo trabajando años atrás en Comitancillo alrededor de 5 años con el apoyo de la organización canadiense Pueblo Partisans quien empezó todo este proceso en Comitancillo; creemos que ella fue uno de los pioneros y facilitadoras de nuestra Asociación y que su relación con la gente fue muy cordial, armoniosa y humanista..
Dejamos constancia de nuestro profundo agradecimiento al pueblo canadiense por el apoyo que siempre nos ha brindado
4. Por lo expuesto, queremos hacer constar que nuestra Asociación está de acuerdo y dispuesto en trabajar en coordinación con la señora Wiebe en relación a la investigación y proyecto ya referidos. Asimismo, Solicitamos de nuevo el apoyo de las organizaciones canadienses para hacer realidad este proyecto.

Al agradecer la gentileza de su atención servida a la presente, quedamos de Ud. muy agradecidos.

Atentamente.

Comitancillo, San Marcos, Guatemala, C.A. 7 de mayo de 1999.

f. .... Isabel Miranda Aguilón
Presidenta Junta Directiva

f. .... Roselia Salvador Juárez
Secretaria Junta Directiva

A.M.M.I.D.

f. .... Ruben Feliciano
Coordinador

[TRANSLATION]
Maya-Mam Association for Research and Development
AMMID
Comitancillo, San Marcos, Guatemala, Central America

To Whom it May Concern:

Respectfully we address you to state the following:

1. Our organization, named the Maya-Mam Association for Research and Development, identified by the abbreviation AMMID, recognized by the government of Guatemala by its Legal Registration by means of the Ministerial Agreement No. 373.97 with the date of November 11, 1997, is a local association for community development whose principal objective is the establishment of a Centre for training, research and community programs in order to promote the participatory and self-determining development of the Municipality of Comitancillo. We work with rural men, women and children through 4 programs that are: Agro-ecology, Women's Development, Education for Democracy, and Integral Health.
2. We have had conversations with Ms. Adriana Wiebe about the possibility of doing a participatory-action research project about the theme of "The life of the rural woman and the role that she plays in the family in times of socio-economic change". We believe that this study will strengthen the process of formation and participation of women in various aspects of their social, economic, cultural, and political reality from a self-determination perspective, which we have been facilitating in our programs with women. Furthermore, parallel to this study we want to develop a artisan production project with a cultural focus so that the work is both theoretical and practical.
3. We want to verify that Ms. Wiebe was previously working in Comitancillo for almost 5 years with the support of the Canadian organization, Pueblo Partisans, who began this whole process in Comitancillo; we believe that she was one of the pioneers and facilitators of our Association, and that her relations with the people were very sincere, harmonious, and humanitarian. We want to state our profound appreciation to the people of Canada for the support they have always shown us.
4. Given the above, we want to state that our Association is in agreement and willing to work in coordination with Ms. Wiebe regarding the project and research referred to here. Therefore we ask the support of Canadian organizations to help make this project a reality.

Appreciating the graciousness of your attention to the present, we are very appreciative.

Attentively,

Comitancillo, San Marcos, Guatemala, C.A. 7 of May of 1999,

[signed]
Isabel Miranda Aguilon
President, Board of Directors

[signed]
Roselia Salvador Juárez
Secretary, Board of Directors

[signed]
Ruben Feliciano, Coordinator

Carta de Entendimiento
Entre AMMID y Lcda. Adriana Wiebe
Enero, 2000

Esta Carta de Entendimiento esta hecho entre los siguientes partidarios:

1. A.M.M.I.D. (Asociación Maya-Mam de Investigación y Desarrollo) de comitancillo, San Marcos, Guatemala,
2. Lcda. Adriana Wiebe, estudiante doctoral de antropología de la Universidad de Alberta, en Edmonton, Alberta, Canadá.

Se acuerdan lo siguiente:

1. AMMID esta de acuedo que Lcda. Wiebe haga una investigación antropológica en Comitancillo sobre el tema de: La Mujer Maya-Mam de Comitancillo.

2. La investigación durará entre 10 y 12 meses entre 1999 – 2001. La investigación incluirá entrevistas individuales, grupos de reflección, tallers, observaciones en las comunidades y estudio de material escrito.

3. Se formarán un Comité Asesor para la investigación compuesta de cinco miembros. Esta Comité reunerá periodicamente para dar ideas y guiar la investigación, y ayudar en la análisis de datos y la formulación de conclusiones.

4. Las identidades de las personas entrevistadas estarán ocultas si no hay permiso específico para utilizar sus nombres.

5. Contribuciones - Lcda. Wiebe esta responsable para lo siguiente:
   - 5.1. todos los gastos de la investigación, incluyendo renumeración para traductoras, recompensación a los entrevistados, gastos del Comité, y gastos para reuniones y tallers,
   - 5.2. apoyo a los grupos de mujeres de AMMID en la busqueda de recursos y fondos para sus proyectos.

6. Contribuciones – AMMID esta responsable para lo siguiente:
   - 6.1. una carta de presentación que explica la relación de colaboración entre AMMID y la investigadora,
   - 6.2. formación del Comité Asesor para la investigación
   - 6.3. apoyo en la identificación de sujetos para entrevistas y grupos de reflección,

7. La Lcda. Wiebe presentará un resumen de los resultados a la Assamblea de AMMID antes de escribir la versión final, para anotar y incorporar sus comentarios en el documento final.

8. AMMID y Lcda. Wiebe buscarán los medios de defundir los resultados de la investigación (por ejemplo, publicaciones, tallers, y encuentros) en Comitancillo y Guatemala.

9. En todas las publicaciones, la Lcda. Wiebe reconocerá el apoyo, la contribución, y la participación de AMMID en la investigación.

10. La Lcda. Wiebe entregará una copia de los resultados finales en Español a AMMID.

11. La Lcda. Wiebe tiene el derecho de utilizar los resultados para sus trabajos universitarios en Canadá.

Este acuerdo se confirmó y firmó la Directiva de AMMID y la Lcda. Wiebe, el día 20 de erneo, de 2000, en Comitancillo, San Marcos, Guatemala

Isabel Miranda Presidente, Junta de Directiva, AMMID	Lcda. Rubén Feliciano Coordinator de AMMID
Lcda. Adriana Wiebe Investigadora, Universidad de Alberta	Dr. C. Roderick Wilson Professor y Supervisor Universidad de Alberta

[TRANSLATION]
Letter of Agreement
Between AMMID and Adrienne Wiebe
January 2000

This Letter of Agreement is an agreement between the following parties:

1. AMMID (Maya-Mam Association for Research and Development) of Comitancillo, San Marcos, Guatemala.
2. Adrienne Wiebe, Doctoral student in Anthropology at the University of Alberta, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada.

The two parties agree to the following:

1. AMMID is in agreement that Adrienne Wiebe will conduct an anthropological study in Comitancillo concerning the Maya-Mam Women of Comitancillo.
2. The research will take 10 to 12 months between 1999-2001. The research will include individual interviews, group reflection, workshops, observations in the communities, and a study of written materials.
3. An Advisory Committee composed of 5 members will be formed for the research. This committee will meet periodically to provide input and guide the research, and help in the analysis of information and formulation of conclusions.
4. The identities of the persons interviewed will be confidential, unless there is permission to use their names.

Contributions:

5.1. Adrienne
5.1.1. Is responsible for all her personal and research expenses, including remuneration of translators, compensation to those interviewed[1], and Committee, meeting, and workshop expenses.
5.1.2. Will support the women's groups in AMMID to obtain further resources and funds for their current projects.

5.2. AMMID
5.2.1. Will extend a letter of presentation that explains the collaborative relationship between AMMID and the researcher.
5.2.2. Lend Adrienne the use of a computer, the library, and other resources of the organization when necessary.
5.2.3. Support the identification of subjects for interviews and groups for reflection.
5.2.4. Lend place for meetings and workshops when necessary.

6. Adrienne will present a summary of the results to the Assembly of AMMID before the final version, in order to record and incorporate their commentaries into the final document.
7. AMMID and Adrienne will search for ways to distribute the results of the research (by means of publications, workshops, and seminars, etc.) in Comitancillo and Guatemala.
8. In all publication, Adrienne will recognize the support, contribution, and participation of AMMID.
9. Adrienne will provide a copy of the final results in Spanish to AMMID. Adrienne has the right to utilize the results for her university work in Canada.

This agreement was confirmed and signed by the Board of Directors of AMMID and Adrienne Wiebe, on the 20th day of January, 1999 in Comitancillo, San Marcos, Guatemala.

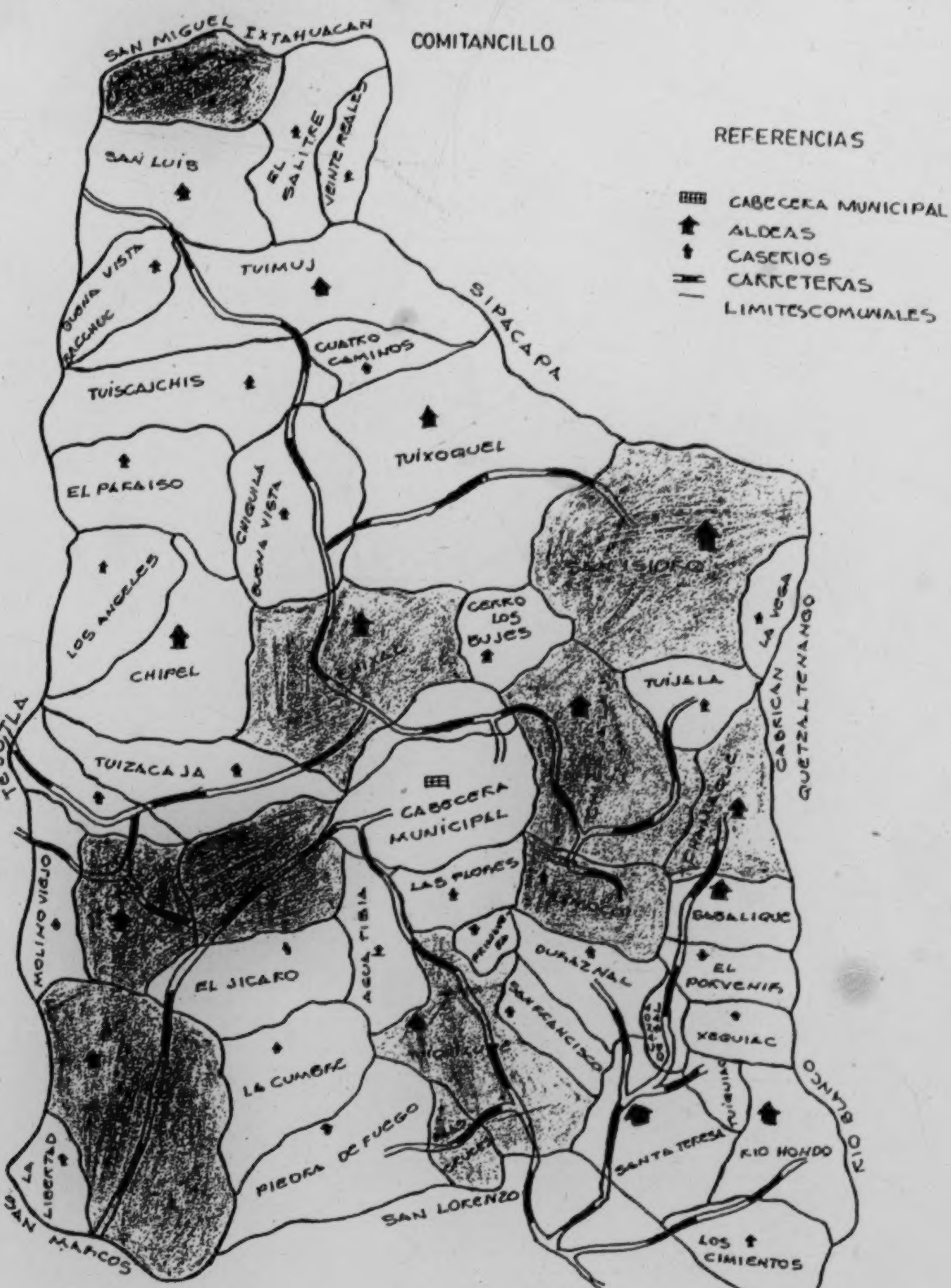
President of the Board of AMMID Isabel Miranda	Coordinator of AMMID Rubén Feliciano
Adrienne Wiebe Researcher University of Alberta	Dr. C.R. Wilson Department of Anthropology University of Alberta

APPENDIX B

LIST OF WOMEN INTERVIEWED BY COMMUNITY OF ORIGIN

Community	17-30 years	30-50 years	50-90 years
1. Los Bujes	2	2	3
2. Taltimiche	3	3	4
3. Chicajalaj	1	2	2
4. Pueblo	2	2	2
5. Ixmoco	2	2	2
6. Chamaque	2	2	1
7. Las Cruces/ Tuichelupe	1	4	1
8. San Jose Frontera	1	1	1
9. San Isidro	2	1	1
10. Tuilelen	1	1	2
11. Chixal	1		
TOTAL	18	20	19

Map of Communities of Origin of Women Interviewed


SAN MIGUEL IXTAHUACAN
COMITANCILLO
REFERENCIAS
CABECERA MUNICIPAL
ALDEAS
CASERIOS
CARRETERAS
LIMITESCOMUNALES
SAN LUIS
EL SALITRE
VEINTE REALES
TUIMUJ
BUENA VISTA BACCHUC
SIPACAPA
CUATRO CAMINOS
TUISCAJCHIS
TUIXOQUEL
EL PARAISO
CHIQUILA BUENA VISTA
SAN ISIDRO
LOS ANGELES
CHIPEL
CERRO LOS BUJES
LA VEGA
TUIJALA
CABRICAN
QUETZALTENANGO
TEJUTLA
TUIZACAJA
CABECERA MUNICIPAL
LAS FLORES
MOLINO VIEJO
BABALIQUE
AGUA TIBIA
DURAZNAL
EL JICARO
EL PORVENIR
SAN FRANCISCO
XEQUIAC
LA CUMBRE
RIO BLANCO
PIEDRA DE FUEGO
SANTA TERESA
RIO HONDO
LA LIBERTAD
SAN LORENZO
SAN MARCOS
LOS CIMIENTOS

APPENDIX C

BASIC INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Questionnaire

Date and Time of Interview
Place of Interview
Persons Present in the Interview

Name
Age Year of Birth Sex Place of Birth
Occupation

Family of Origin

Occupation of Father
Occupation of Mother
Number of Sisters Brothers No. of Siblings no longer living Birth Order
Language Religion

Education

1. What kind of education do your parents have?
2. What kind of education do your siblings have?
3. How many years of education have you had? Where? What program did you study? If you did not go to school, why?
4. How did you decide what to study?
5. What did the rest of your family think of your studies? What did the other women in the community think?
6. How did you pay for the expenses of schooling?
7. Do you think you did the best thin~~k~~g? Would you do something different?

Domestic and Agricultural Work

8. Where do you live now and with whom?
9. Do you have your own land? House? Inheritance? How was the inheritance distributed?
10. What work do you do in the home? What does you husband do? What do the others in the house do?
11. What things do you buy and where do you buy them? What things do you produce in the home? What foods? Clothes? Medicines?....
12. Who makes decisions about what to buy and how?
13. Who decides about the use of family property? For example, who decides if a household tool is lent to a neighbour?
14. How are these things the same or different from when you were a child?
15. Who does which tasks in the fields? Who decides what is to be done?
16. Who manages the money, buys the agricultural supplies, and sells the harvest? What about with animals?
17. Does your family work on the plantations? Who does? When?
18. How is this the same or different from when you were a child?

Paid Work

19. What are the types of paid work and vocations that are appropriate for women? What are the types of paid work available to the women of Comitancillo?
20. What kinds of paid work have you had?

21. Do you have paid work now? If so, how did you start? What was your reason for starting? Do you like your work? What did you family think? What did other women think? What are the conditions of your work?
22. What kinds of paid work do other members of your family do?
23. How is this the same or different from when you were a child?
24. What do you think of the opportunities that women have now? Are they good? Lacking?

Reproduction

25. At what age did you get married or start living with your husband?
26. How did you get to know your husband and how did you decide to get together with him? Are there people who it would be incorrect for them to marry? Could you marry anyone? Is this the same or different from how it was for your parents or grandparents?
27. How many children do you have? What are their ages and sexes? Have you had any children that have died? If so, what happened?
28. How many children do you want to have? What does your husband think? What is the ideal number of children? Is this the same or different from what your mother thought?
29. What do people in the community think of women who have children, but do not have a husband? Is this accepted? Can this woman easily marry again? What happens to women who never get married?
30. What do you hope for your children in terms of education and work?
31. What language do you speak at home? How do you dress your daughters and sons? Do your children know traditional Mam stories and customs?

Community Activities

32. In what community activities, groups, fiestas, celebrations, committees, family events, etc. are you involved in?
33. Do you travel outside of Comitancillo? If so, to where, why and with whom?

Ideas about Gender, Ethnicity and Life

34. A. What do you consider the characteristics of the ideal women in Comitancillo? The ideal man?
    b. What do you think are the most important things you can teach you children?
35. How do you identify yourself? (i.e. Comiteca? Mam? Maya? Natural? Indigena? San Marquense? Guatemalateca?...) What does this mean to you?
36. What do you think of a woman from San Pedro (neighbouring town)? A Quiché farmer? Can you give me an example of a Ladino?
37. What things give you the most joy in your life? What things make you suffer? What things make you afraid?
38. If you could imagine a perfect future for yourself and your family, what would it be like? In five years? In 20 years?

APPENDIX D

RESEARCH ETHICS STATEMENT

Research Ethics Statement

Adrienne Wiebe
PhD Student, Anthropology
September, 1998

This Research Ethics Statement pertains to doctoral field work in Guatemala planned for August, 1999 – August, 2000.

Potential Harm

The research methodology utilizes interviews, surveys and participant observation to gather data. There is little likelihood of physical or mental harm for individuals responding to questions or providing information. If at any time it appears that an individual is feeling discomfort with the questions, methods or presence of the researcher, the researcher will immediately check this perception, and discontinue the process if necessary.

Neither covert observation nor concealed data collection is planned. Most community members already know me, and have been involved in community discussions regarding of my research objectives and activities.

Informed Consent

At a community level, consent was granted in July, 1998 when I made a pre-fieldwork trip to the village of Comitancillo to discuss the proposed research with community residents. The research will be conducted in cooperation with AMMID (the Maya-Mam Association for Research and Development), a community-based development association. I met with the Board of Directors, the staff, and 10 community-level groups (about 200 members) to discuss the idea of a community-based research project. The response was overwhelmingly positive, and attached is a letter from the organization. Regular meetings with AMMID members during the research process will enable communication lines to remain open, and arising problems or concerns will be addressed.

A letter of permission from the Municipal government has been requested, and I am checking into the need for research permits from other levels of government.

All participants will be informed of the research purpose and methodology. A consent form will be signed (or witnessed) in the language (Spanish or Mam) of the participant before each interview is conducted

All participation will be completely voluntary, and at any time participants may withdraw from the interview or the research project.

Anonymity

The names and identities of participants will be disguised in all printed matter resulting from the research. In general, details will be changed to make it impossible to identify exact persons or families. However, in special cases, permission will be sought in advance when an identifiable quote or description is required in published materials.

Appropriate Use of the Results

As much as possible, information and findings will be presented to community members and those involved before being presented outside the community. This will be a means of authenticating findings, as well as obtaining permission to take this information out. While not all results may necessarily be flattering to the community or segments of it, at least the data must be as accurate as possible.

Support Personnel

I plan to do the majority of the interviews and survey work myself, however local people may participate and/or be employed to assist with particular aspects of the work. I will instruct paid and volunteer persons involved in data collection regarding codes of confidentiality, consistent adherence to research guidelines, and the particular skills needed for the task.

Compensation

At a community level, I plan to establish a form of reciprocity in two ways. Firstly, the research results will belong to AMMID and myself. The materials and publications that are outcomes of the research process will be used by the association in its own development planning and be shared with other Mayan organizations in the region.

Secondly, I have been able to secure funding from an Edmonton-based development organization for a women's credit project in the community. I discussed this possibility with the association members during my trip in July,1998.

At an individual level, I hope that I am able to provide a small token of appreciation to each person participating in individual interviews. The exact nature of this gift will be determined in consultation with appropriate local residents and the staff and Board of AMMID.

I have read, understood, and will adhere to, the guidelines of the University of Alberta Standards for the Protection of Human Research Participants, as outlined by the Department of Anthropology.

September 29, 1998

Signed Adrienne Wiebe

UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

CERTIFICATION OF ETHICAL ACCEPTABILITY

FACULTY OF ARTS HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

APPLICANT'S NAME: Adrienne Wiebe (PhD student)

APPLICANT'S DEPARTMENT: Anthropology

APPLICATION TITLE: Pertains to doctoral field work in Guatemala planned for August 1999-August 2000

The application noted above was reviewed by the Faculty of Arts Human Research Ethics Committee. The committee was constituted and the decision was rendered as specified in the University of Alberta Policy Related to Ethics in Human Research (September 1, 1990). The committee reviewers for this application are listed below.

This is to certify that the project and/or procedures outlined in the application were found to be acceptable on ethical grounds and to be generally in accord with policy guidelines as laid down by this University for such research involving human participants.

Date: Nov. 17/98

Dr O Beattie, Associate Chair
Human Research Ethics Review Committee
Department of Anthropology

Reviewers for this application:

✓	C Schweger (Anthropology)	Charles Schweger.
✓	D Bai (Anthropology)	David Bai
✓	A Weber (Anthropology	
_	S Bamforth (Pediatrics)	OB

/gm

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APPENDIX E

DAILY HOUSEHOLD ACTIVITY RECORDS

Participant Families in Household Activity Records

Family	Community	Household Economic Base	Household Composition	Number of Children
Victor Miranda Vasquez & Vitalina Salvador	Los Bujes	Agriculture and seasonal plantation labour	Married couple (M38 & F32)	7 children
Gerardo Agustin & Teresa Salvador	Los Bujes	Agriculture and Tailor	Married couple (M40 & F36)	6 children
Petrona Miranda	Ixmoco	Agriculture, midwife and son in the U.S.A.	Widowed woman (46)	5 children
Martina Feliciano & William Salvador	Tuijalaj	Both are teachers and agriculture	Married couple (M28 & F29)	2 children
Roselia Salvador	Chicajalaj	Agriculture, craft production, finca	Single Mother (33 yrs) living with father (62)	2 children
Olga Agustin & Humberto Salvador	Los Bujes	Agriculture, wage labour, and crafts	Married couple (M38 & F32) and husband's mother (73)	7 children
Isabel Miranda & Fidencio Aquilon	Taltimiche	Agriculture, NGO work, crafts	Married couple (M34 & F 33)	8 children

Registro de Actividades – Familias de Encuesta

Nombre de Familia:

Aldea Las Bujes.

Nombre	Relacion	Sexo	Edad	Occupacion
	Esposo	Masculino	38	Agricultor
	Esposa	femenino	32	Doméstico
	Hija	"	15	Estudiante
	"	"	13	"
	"	"	10	"
	Hijo	masculino	8	"
	"	"	6	"
	Hija	femenino	4	
	Hijo	masculino	1	
	Abuelita	femenino	73	Doméstico

REGISTRO DE ACTIVIDADES EN LA CASA.

Familia.

Fecha. martes 8 de febrero

Hora	Señora	Señor
1:00am.	Durmiendo	Durmiendo
2:00	↓	↓
3:00	↓	↓
4:00	Se levanto; juntó el fuego, lavó el nixtamal y empesó a moler con la piedra de m.	↓
5:00	Empesó a preparar el desayuno, hizo la tortillas y preparó el almuerzo de su esposo para que lo lleva en su trabajo.	Se levantó; hizo el aseo personal, preparó sus materiales para llevar en su trabajo y desayunó.
6:00	molió la comida de los cuches, en la piedra de moler.	llegó en su trabajo y empesó a trabajar, en la construcción de una casa en la aldea Zuiteten. fue en la camioneta.
7:00	Desayunó, lavó los platos y barrió en la cocina.	trabajó
8:00	fue a mantener los coches. desgranó el maíz para la comida de los pollos.	↓

10:00	↓	↓
11:00	↓	↓
12:00	Entró en la cocina a preparar el almuerzos, envolvió las tamalitas y lo puso a coser.	Almuerzó
1:00 pm.	Almuerzó y limpió la cocina	Trabajó
2:00	Hizo el aseo personal, y preparó para ir en la reunión de la palabra de Dios.	↓
3:00	Llegó en la reunión. Caminó 20 minutos de llegada	Salió de su trabajo y regresó en su casa.
4:00	Estubo en la reunión	fué a traer leña en el bosque. Caminó 30 minutas en la llegada.
5:00	↓	Cortó leña
6:00	Regresö en su casa, caminó 20 minutos y empesó a desgranar el maíz.	Regresó con un bulto de leña y caminó 30 minutas de regreso.

7:00	Empezó a cocer el maíz y preparó la cena.	Practicó a tocar la guitarra. ahí misma en la losa
8:00	Cenó y limpió la cocina.	Cenó
9:00	Durmió	Durmió
10:00	↓	↓
11:00	↓	↓
12:00	↓	↓

APPENDIX F

LAND DISPUTES INVOLVING COMITANCILLO
Archivo General de Centro America

Records of Land Disputes Involving Comitancillo in the *Archivo General de Centro America* (ACGA)

Date	Content of Document	Reference in ACGA
1790	Documenting boundary between Comitancillo and Tejutla	Referred to in report of Eng. Luis Aquilar, in *Jefetura Politico*, 1909
1794	Problem with limits of the *ejidos* of Comitancillo	AGCA AI.45.9 Leg.5329 Exp.44.893
1800	José Domingo Hidalgo bequeaths el *ejido que le correspondia* to Comitancillo	AGCA Exp.53.432 Leg. 6050 Folio 3
1808	A new survey of the boundaries of the *ejido* of Comitancillo is done because *Comitecos* think people from Sipacapa have claimed too much	AGCA Exp. 53.333 Leg. 6043
1810	Information concerning the revision of the survey between Comitancillo and Sipacapa	AGCA Exp. 53.333 Leg. 6043 Folio 8
1824	Dispute between Comitancillo and San Miquel Ixtaguacan regarding boundaries	AGCA B100.1 Exp.33041 Leg 1415
1841	Dispute between Comitancillo and Tejutla regarding part of the *aldea* of Chipel	AGCA B100.1 Exp. 33256 Leg. 1419
1841	Dispute between Comitancillo and San Lorenzo regarding boundaries	AGCA B100.1 Exp. 33266 Leg. 1419 Folio 1
1843	Documents regarding land rights of Comitancillo	AGCA B100.1 Exp. 33318 Leg. 1419
1843	Decisions regarding Comitancillo and San Lorenzo boundary dispute	AGCA B100.1 Leg. 1419 Exp. 33336
1845	Documents sent to San Marcos to request resurveying of *ejido* of Comitancillo	AGCA B89.2 Exp. 29815 Leg. 1229

APPENDIX G

COMITANCILLO MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT
Twentieth Century

The following information was gleaned from the municipal records of Comitancillo. There are many gaps in the chronology, but this information is included here to provide a beginning for the task of writing a complete history of the community.

	Names of Officials	Other Information	Key National Events & Figures
1879			President General Justo Rufino Barrios (1873-1885)
1888		Juan Jimenez – signs accounts After June – Mariano de Leon There is one boys school and one girls school in town	
1890		Municipality receives payment for sending labourers (*mandamientos*) to plantations	
1893			
1897			
1898			President Cabrera 1898-1920
1899			
1900			
1901			
1902			
1903			
1904			
1905			
1906		Nicolas Ramirez – Treasurer	
1907	First Mayor – unknown Second Mayor - Manuel Matias		
1908	First Mayor - Rufino Lopez	Secretary – Nicolas Ramirez	
1909		Municipality receives 120 pesos for 40 labourers to plantations	
1910		Municipal Secretary – Nicolas Ramirez	
1911	Simon Lopez	Treasurer and Secretary - Nicolas Ramirez	
1912			
13	Maracrio Lopez		
14	Antonio Guzman		
15	Manuel Santos Ventura	Secretary - Antonio Ramirez Eusebio Reina – holds many municipal positions	

		End of 1915 – new Municipal building inaugurated	
16			
17			
18		Secretary- Nicolas Ramirez Military Commissioner – Eusebio Reina	
19	Antonio Ventura José Luciano Salvador		
1920	Manuel Matías	Original Municipal Building built	Presidency of Cabrera ends
21	Manuel Matías		
22	Apolonio Juarez	Sent 40 labourers a month for construction of railway from Quetzaltenango to the coast May 26 – individual rights in whole country suspended -Aug 25 –further suspension of rights because of rebellions in other parts of the country	
23	Margarito Ramirez	Still sending mozos to railway construction Asked Pres for time off because of planting	
24	Jose Luciano Salvador		
25	Apolonio Juarez 2nd – Laureano Miranda	Secretary – Olegario Calderon	
26	"		
27	"		
28			
29			
1930	Apolonio Marroquín		
31	Gregorio Miranda	Secretary – Olegario Calderon	President General Jorge Ubico (1931-1944)
32	Apolonio Juarez		
33	Apolonio Marroquin	Treasurer – Martin Lopez Secretary - Jorge Merida	
34		Electricity in the Pueblo	Vagrancy Law
35			
36	Sindico Muni – Hilario Lopez Regidor 1º - Antonio Cardona Intendente Lauriano Miranda	Comité "Pro-Carretera" – Comitancillo-San Lorenzo Jorge Merida – Rep. Of Club Liberal Progresista	

37	Intendente – Felipe de Aquila Sindico Municipal – Matias Perez Later in the year: Intendente Fidel Aquilón		
38	Intendente – Maldonado – resigns in March because of family illness Temporary – Jorge Merida April – Intendente (& Juez de Paz) Juan Sosa		
39			
1940			
41	Intendente Diaz		
42		First vehicle road inaugurated by Ubico Electricity installed in town	
43			
44	Martín Garcia - Alcalde		Ubico overthrown in military coup
45	Catalino Feliciano G. - Alcalde Intendente Muni. Alfredo E. Lopez y Lopez		President Arevalo (1945-1950)
46		Secretary – Max Avila	
47	Albino Lopez	Built Market building that lasted only 15 days, and then destroyed by wind storm -Registry of Electorate	
48	Basilio Orozco	Secretary - Max Avila	
49			
1950	Basilio Lorenzo Miranda	Secretary- Max Avila	
51	Basilio Lorenzo Miranda	Secretary - Carlos Muñoz A chapter of the Partido Acción Revolucionario formed in Comitancillo	President Jacobo Arbenz (1950-1954)
52		Theatre built	
53	Bernabé Feliciano Cruz Lopez?		
54	Santiago Ventura		Miilitary Coup overthrows Arbenz – Coronel Castillo Armas (1954-1957)

55	Bernabé Juarez Abril – Victor Navarro F.?		
56	Daniel Muñoz –elected on party platform of Movimiento Democratico Nacionalista		
57	"		
58		Secretary Augusto Ochoa	Gen. Ydígoras Fuentes elected President
59	Moises Rodas de León	Registro electoral – lists less than 1000 men as eligible to vote	
			Military uprising against Ydígoras
1960	Francisco Isidro Lopez R.		Student & labour demonstrations
61			
62			
63	Santos Marroquín		Military coup Led by Col Enrique Peralta Azurdia
64			
65	Ricardo Juarez	First permanent priest takes up residence	
66	O. Marroquin Daniel Muñoz (from town)	Built market building built	Méndez Montenegro elected President
67	Daniel Muñoz	Built swimming pool	
68	Bernardo Marroquín		Overthrow and then Col. Arana President
69	Gerardo Candido Miranda (from Chicajalaj)	Monsignor Carrera arrives in the parish (1969-2002)	
1970			
71			
72			
73			
74	Ricardo Juarez (from town)		General Laugerud President
75	"		

76	Bernardo Marroquin Ramirez		Massive earthquake
77	Domingo Miranda? Marcos Cardona Lopez	Design and contract for new Municipal building	
78	Marcos Cardona Lopez		Gen. Lucas García – President
79	"		Guerrilla activity increases
1980	Marcos Cardona Lopez (from Chamaque)		
81			1981-1983 over 400 Indian villages destroyed in highlands by military
82	Carmen Enrique Ramirez Miranda (from town)	Secretary – Alvaro Ochoa Barrios	General Ríos Montt seizes power in coup
83	"		Gen. Mejía Víctores seizes power in coup
84	Guadalupe Isidro Juarez (from Tuichelupe)		
85	Ruben Marroquin Lopez		
86	Julian Marroquin Perez Chicajalaj		Cerezo elected Prsident
87	"		
88	"		
89	Max?		
1990			
91	Miquel Aquilón	Two communities (Chicajalaj and Los Bujes) have electricity	Serrano elected President
92			
93		State Justice of Peace office openned in Comitancillo	De Leon Carpio?
94			
95		Five more communities receive electricity	
96	Santos Miranda y Miranda		Presdient Arzú Peace Accords between guerrillas and government signed
97			
98			

99		First Police Station opened	
2000			
2001	Romulo Ramirez	Only 3/48 communities lack electricity	President Portillo

Justices of the Peace

1907 – Mariano Avila

1935 – Luciano Miranda

1946 – Albino Lopez

1948 – 1950 Basilio Orozco

1951 – Basilio Marroquín

1954 – Pedro Temaj / Martin Garcia

1958 – Moises Rodas de Leon

1960 – Francisco Lopez R.

1963 – Santos Marroquin

1965 – Bonifacio Salvador Marroquin

1969 – Santos Marroquin

1970 - Francisco Marroquin

1976 – Roberta Perez Z.

1980 - Eugenio Salvador

There was reference in the literature to two monographs concerning Comitancillo, however, I was not able to locate these documents. They are:

Morales, Pablo. 1949.
Aspectos Monográficos del Municipio de Comitancillo, San Marcos. Guatemala: Instituto Indigenista Nacional de Guatemala.

Bucaro Moraga, Jaime. 1964.
Algunos Aspectos Socioeconomicos de la Comunidad de Comitancillo, San Marcos. Guatemala: Instituto Indigenista Nacional de Guatemala.

APPENDIX H

PHOTO FILE

Three Generations of *Comiteca* Women

All photographs taken by and property of Adrienne Wiebe and Arturo Avila, unless otherwise noted.

Views of the Municipality of Comitancillo

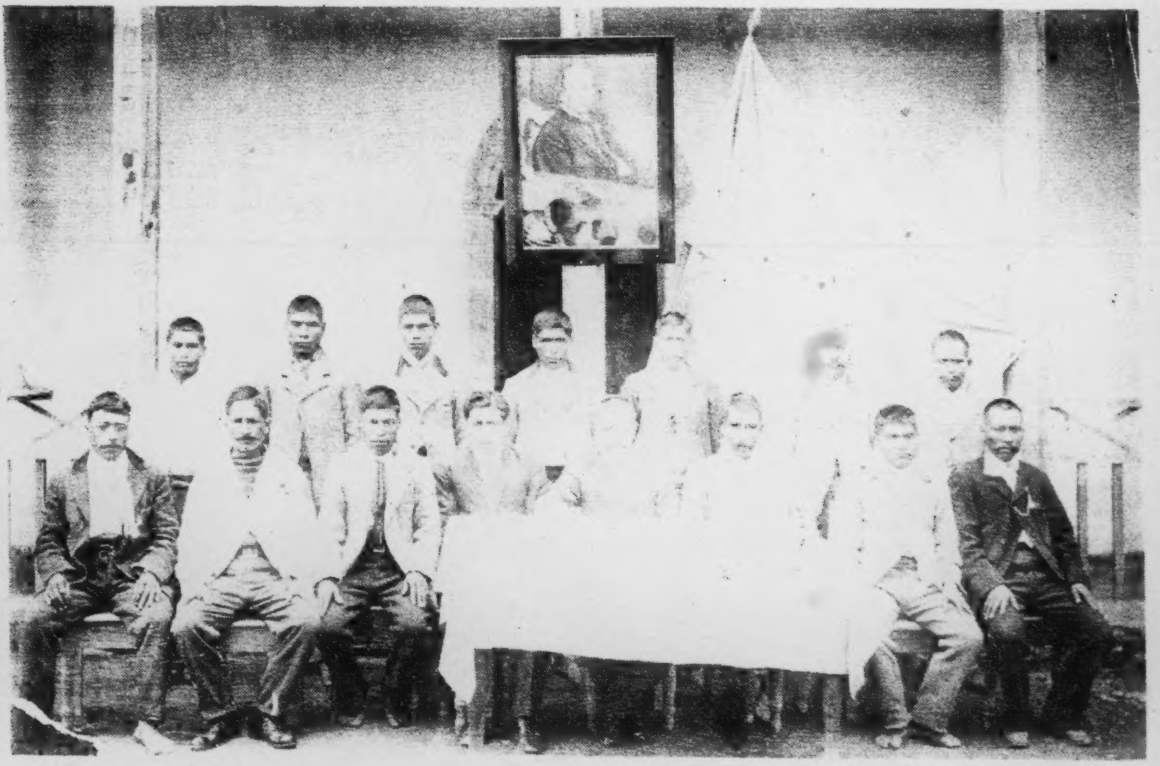
Right: The fields and houses during the rainy season (May to October)

Below: The valley with the town centre in the middle (the Catholic Church dominates the town) during the dry season, November-April

Historic Photo

Below: The Municipal Authorities of Comitancillo.
Photo taken in the early twentieth century
because the President pictured
in the background is Manuel Estrada Cabrera,
(President from 1898-1920)

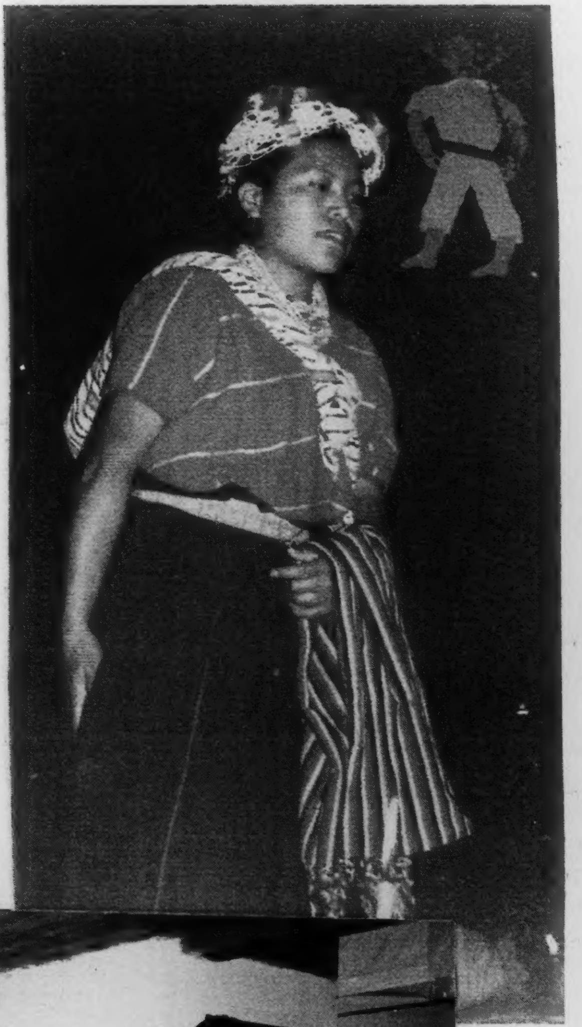
Photo property of
Bonarjes Reyna, Comitancillo

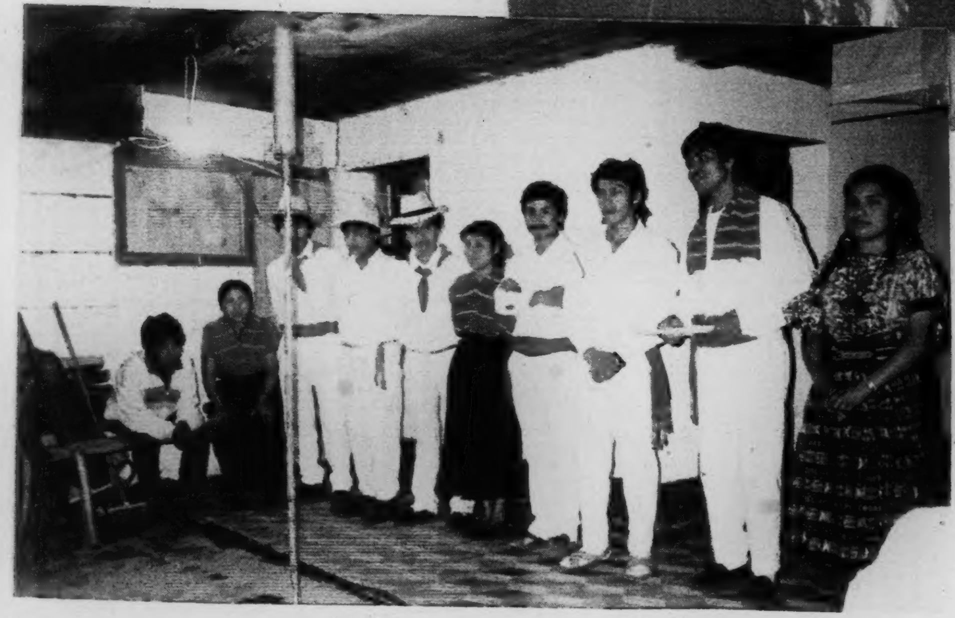


Distinctive *Comiteco* Clothing

Right: Miriam Salvador, the research Assistant for this project, is wearing the complete female outfit of Comitancillo, with red *huipil,* blue *corte, faja,* shawl, and headband.

Below: The men are wearing the complete men's outfit, with pants and shirt made of *moj* (white woven linen), and a red sash.

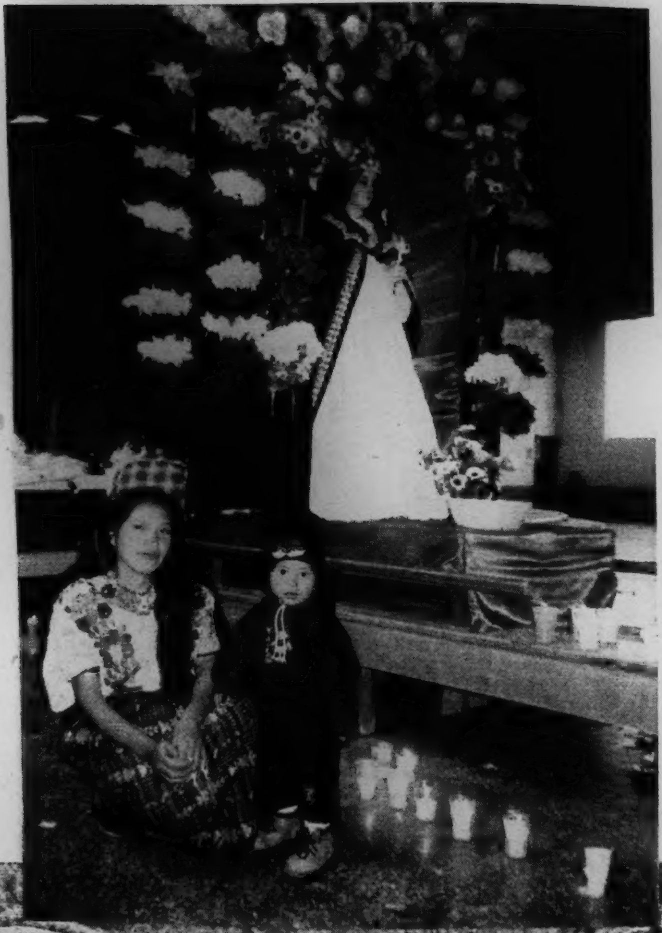


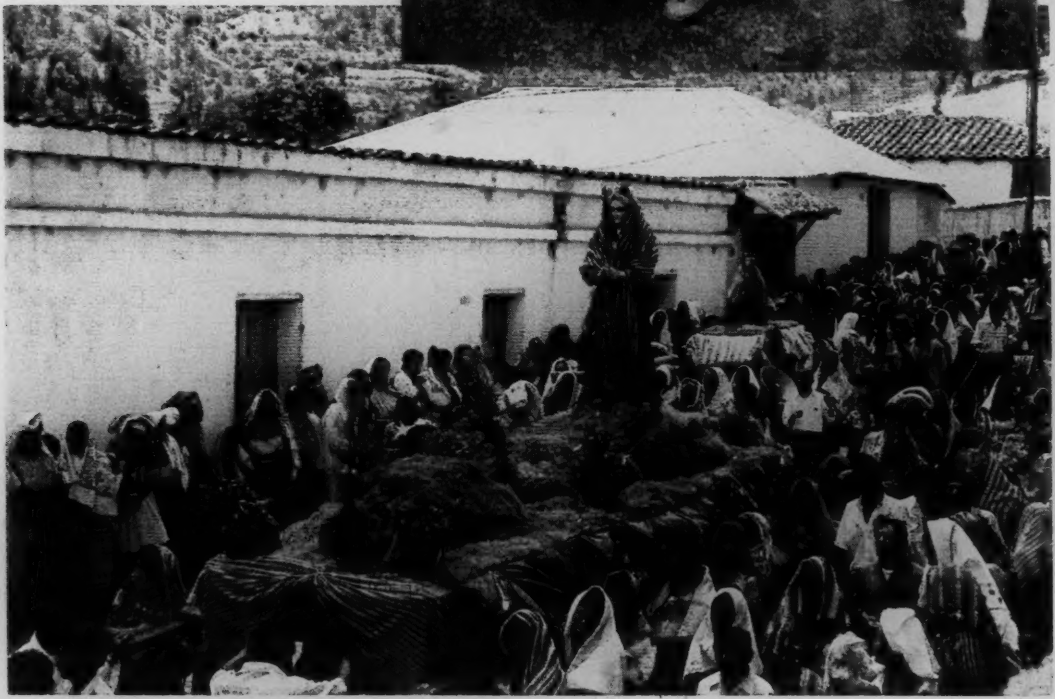


Religious Celebrations

Right: The Image of the Virgin Mary is ready for the procession on May 28.

Below: The procession with the Image of the Virgin Mary, but this time dressed in *Comiteca* Maya clothing.





Mayan Spirituality

A Mayan religious ceremony held in a clearing in the forest.

Comitancillo Market

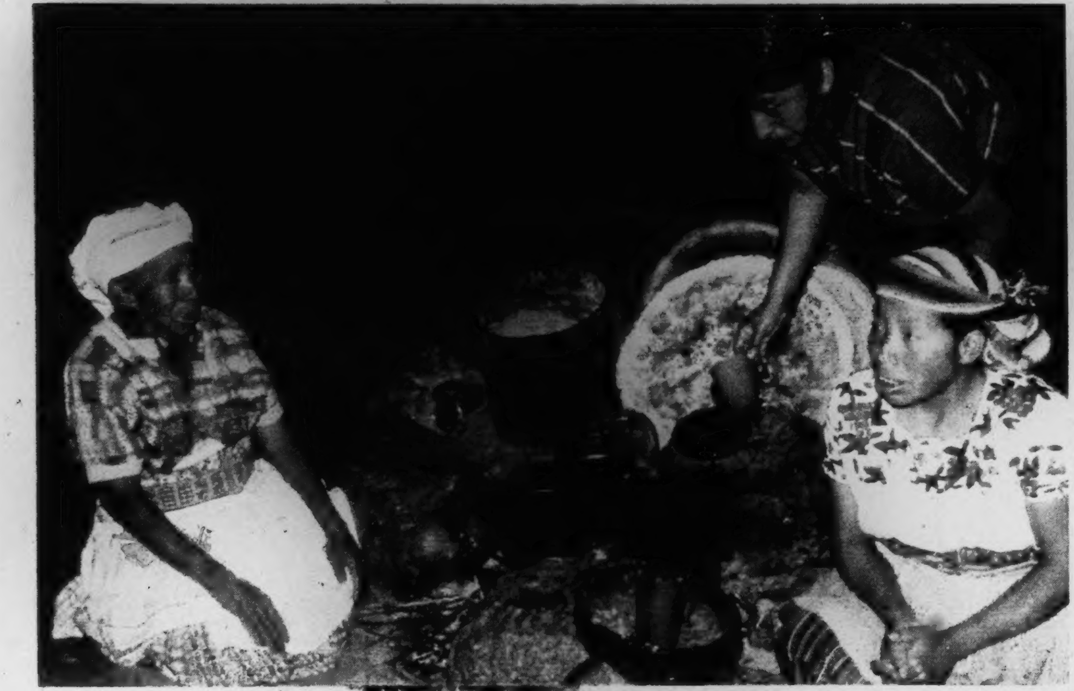
Below Top: Selling bananas from the coast at the Comitancillo Sunday market.

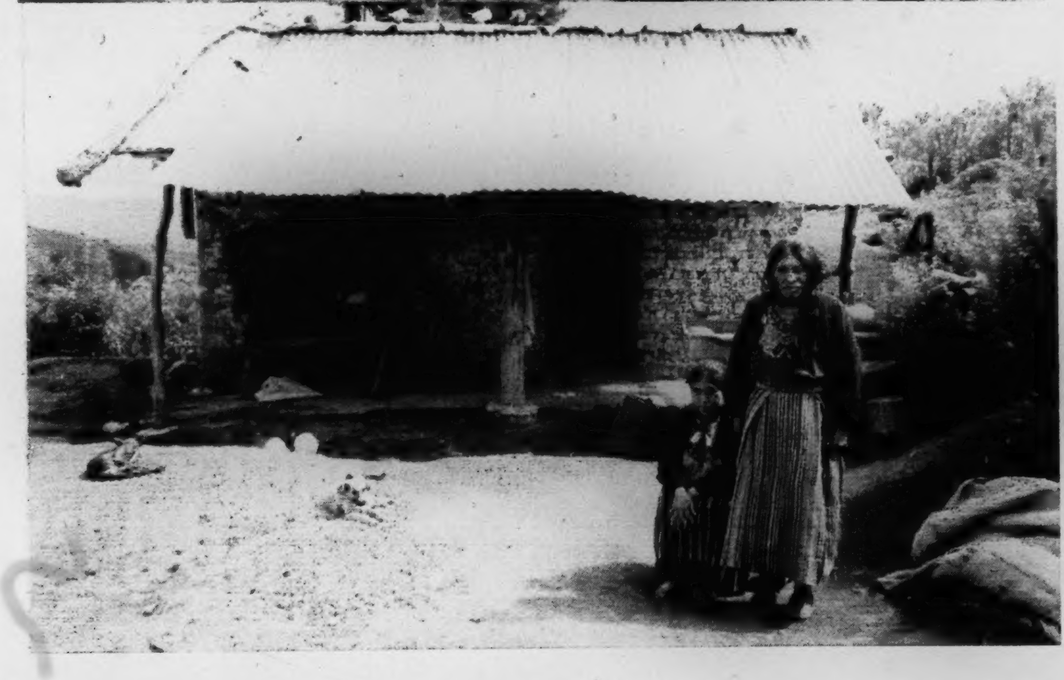
Below Bottom: Selling pottery at the Sunday market.

Comitancillo Homes

Below Top: Two generations of women cooking on an open fire with pots balanced on the customary three large stones. (Photo by Tena Wiebe)

Below Bottom: A house built of traditional adobe blocks, with a corrugated tin roof. Many houses have clay tile or thatched roofs (See picture on page 2 of this appendix)

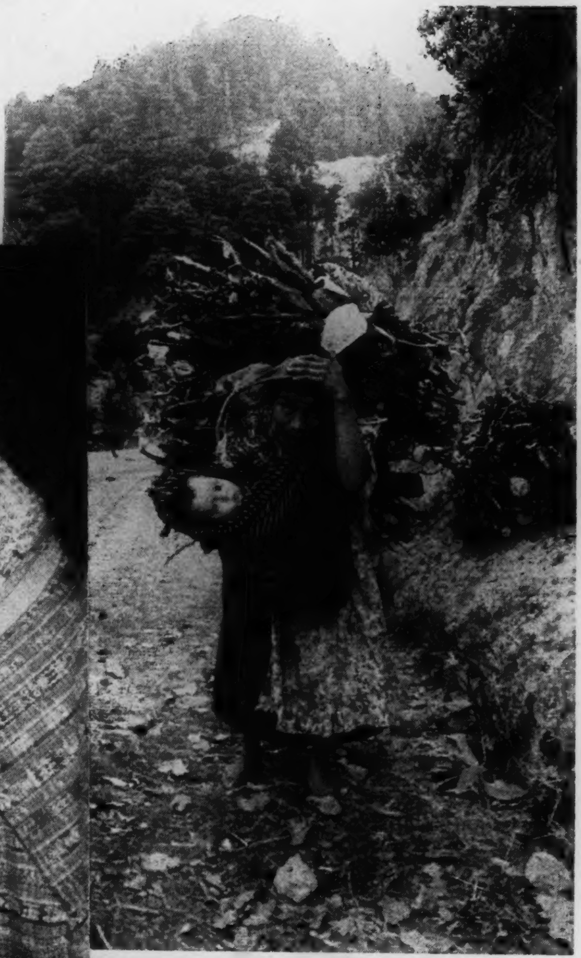


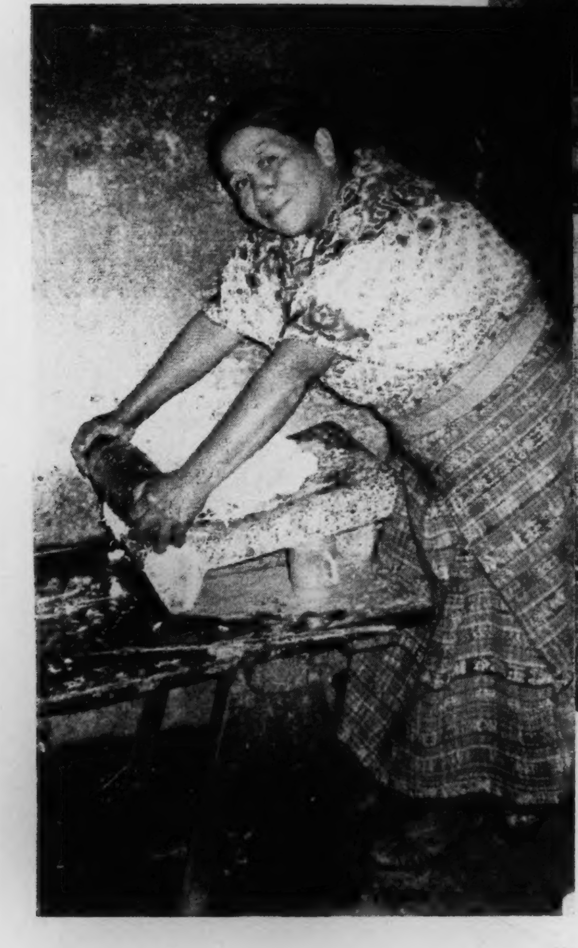


Women's Work

Right: Carrying firewood home using a *mecapal y lazo* (trumpline and rope)

Below: Grinding *maza* (cooked maize) by hand on a *metate* (stone grinding mill) occupies many hours of a woman's day if there is no motor-powered mill in the community

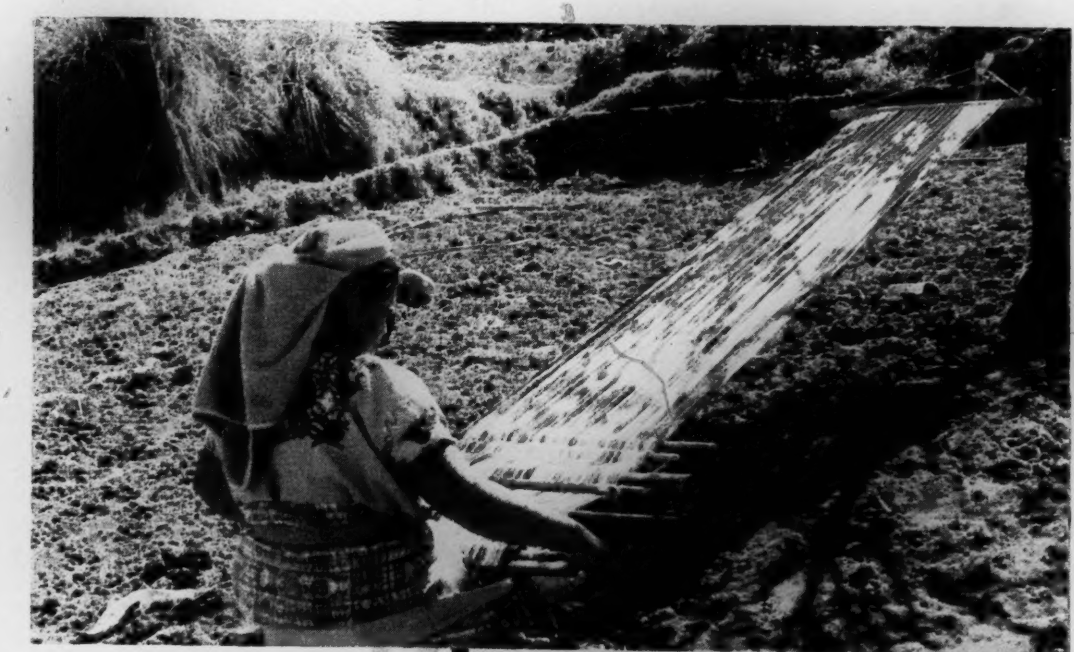


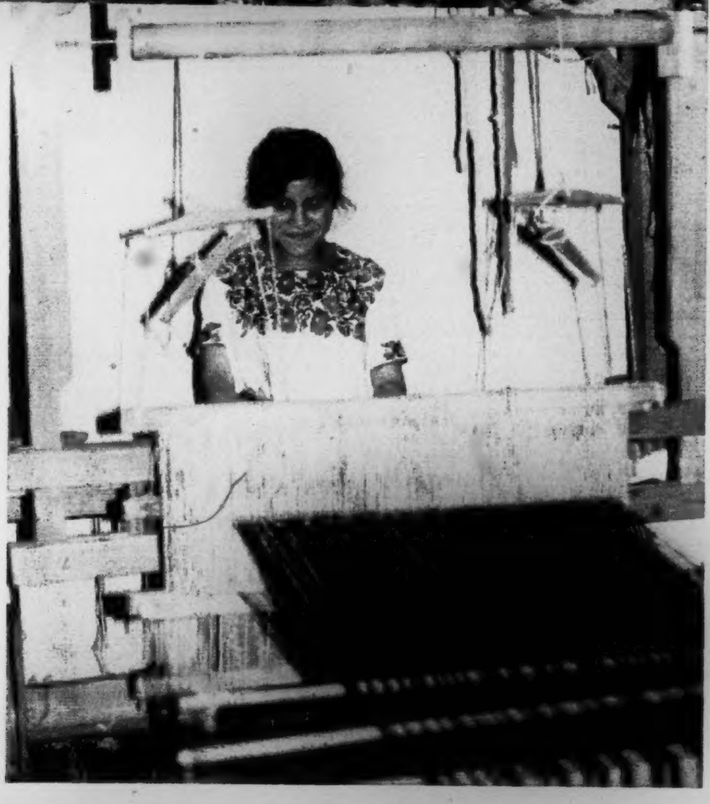


Weaving

Below Top: Weaving on a backstrap loom.

Below Bottom: Weaving on a footloom.





Collective Production

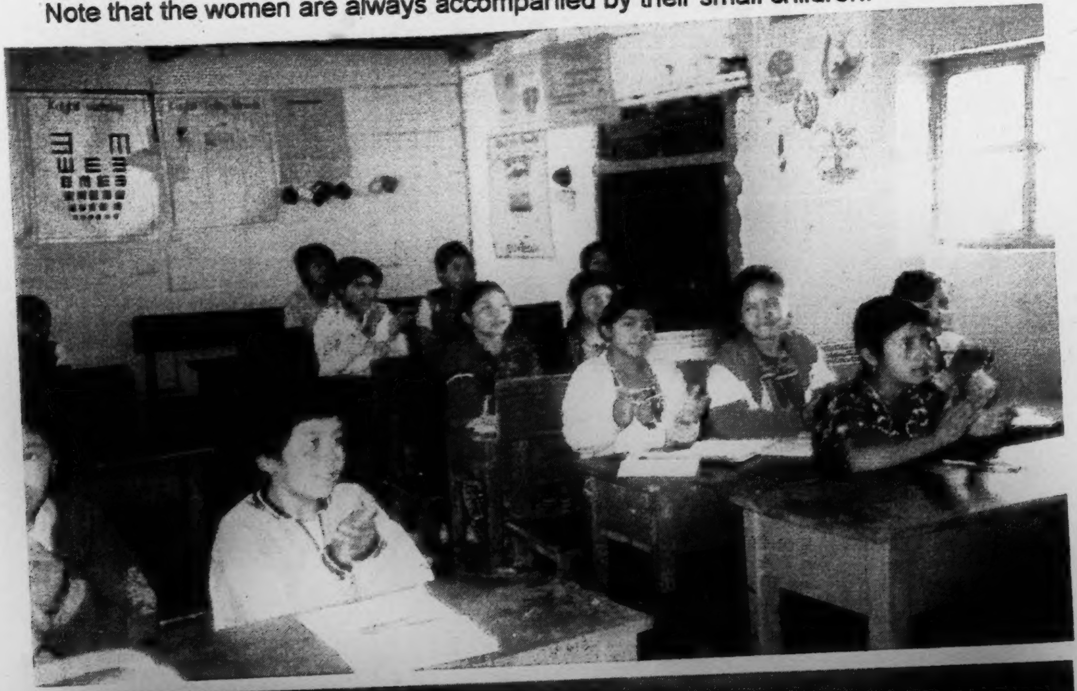
Right: Group production of candles for sale.

Below: A group of 15 women share four sewing machines to produce embroidered blouses like the ones they are wearing.

Education

Below Top: The number of girls attending at least a few years of elementary school is increasing.

Below Bottom: Many adult women participate in adult literacy programs and popular education and training workshops, such as the one-day project planning session below. Note that the women are always accompanied by their small children.



Maps 1, 3, and 4 courtesy of the Teresa Lozano Long Institute of Latin American Studies, University of Texas at Austin. Reproduced from *Guatemalan Indians and the State: 1540 to 1988,* edited by Carol A. Smith (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1990).

Maps 2 and 5 courtesy of Rubén Feliciano, Asociación Maya-Mam de Investigaciones y Desarrollo, Comitancillo, Guatemala.